

World Youth Day Catechesis
Theme One: “Firm in the Faith”
Bishop Frank J. Caggiano

Scripture Text: “Planted and built up in Jesus Christ, firm in the faith” (Col. 2:7)

I. Introduction:

- A. **I wish to thank you** for making the long journey to Madrid..
 - i. Remember, we are **pilgrims** walking with Jesus **to a holy place= encounter with Him**
 - 1. May this be a time of great grace and blessing for each of you.
- B. **It is an honor** for me to participate with you
 - i. It is my **second experience of WYD**
 - 1. It was a real spiritual gift of renewal
 - ii. Happy that we have this time together to reflect upon our faith
- C. **As we start of this first session,** let us pray for each other that the **Lord’s purpose** in bringing us together will be fulfilled

II. Pope Benedict, has asked us to seek a threefold grace, with each of the next **three days dedicated to exploring each of these graces:**

- i. **Today: we are asked to deepen our understanding of the gift of faith**
 - 1. Divine Gift that we must accept and allow to change us, illuminate us, to guide us in life
 - 2. As Pope Benedict teaches us: “It is a Divine Gift that is not just to believe certain things are true but to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus”
- ii. **Tomorrow: At the heart of our faith is a person, unlike any other person:**
 - 1. To invite Jesus to be the foundation of our lives as we strive to seek holiness
- iii. **Friday: To go forth to work the mission** that Christ gives us:
 - 1. To preach the “*Good News*” to all the world as “witnesses”
 - a. In short: **To change the world!**

III. Personal Story:

A. Palm Sunday Morning, 1987

- i. Started like any other morning:
 - 1. Breakfast early....start of Holy Week and as sacristan at the seminary, there was a busy day ahead!
 - 2. Three other seminarians were sacristans....one was Peter

- ii. Peter: Classmate who did not have the easiest time in the seminary
 - 1. Believed in his heart that God was calling him to priesthood
 - a. Determined to answer the call
- B. This **one fateful day**, Peter began our **breakfast** with a strange comment; “Frank, I can’t feel one side of my face. Do you think it is serious?”
 - i. I was only **half listening**...busy with the details of the day
 - 1. I **muttered** some answer...slept the wrong way.. caught a cold...your imagination
 - a. No need to worry...life goes on.
- C. **Second comment** caused me to **stop dead in my tracks**:
 - i. “Frank, if anything happens to me, will you give my parents a **letter** that I have written”
 - 1. I was astonished...confused...unprepared for the question or to answer it
 - ii. So I **dismissed** it, telling him we could discuss it later (in the hope that he would forget about so morbid and depressing a request)
 - 1. But he did not...**unknown to me**, he wrote the letter and gave it to the spiritual director of the seminary
 - a. Who read it to the entire congregation at Peter’s **funeral** five weeks later
- D. Because what we were **soon to learn** was that Peter had **contracted a violent form of cancer**, at the base of his brain, that could not be stopped
 - i. He was well enough to be ordained a deacon with the class, although he had difficulty prostrating himself
 - ii. By priesthood retreat, he was mostly in bed, **consoling us (and not the other way around)!**
 - iii. He was too sick to be ordained at the Cathedral but became a priest of Jesus Christ in the Hospital...so weak that he was unable to celebrate the entire Mass
 - 1. He died the day I was ordained a priest: May 16, 1987
- E. **I and my classmates were torn apart during these weeks**
 - i. **How could this be happening?**
 - 1. How could someone who wanted to serve the Lord be repaid in such a way?
 - 2. For the first few weeks, it was a time of many questions with few answers
 - ii. **Not for Peter:**
 - 1. Two weeks before his ordination and 19 days before his death, he proudly revealed his prayer card:
 - a. **“For to me Life is Christ and death is gain”.**

2. I sat there in utter silence
 - a. **For I saw with my own eyes the power of Christian faith**
 - i. Peter believed in the words and promises of Jesus...and upon his death I believe with all my heart that Jesus set Peter, his priest, brother and friend, free!

IV. **Gift of Christian Faith:**

A. **This is what brings us together....**Peter and the witness of countless others who embraced the gift of faith in Jesus and were transformed by holiness.

- i. It is the same gift that you and I have received and we are called to answer, nurture and allow to change us forever!

B. **What does the Church teach about Faith?**

- i. **Faith** is a Divine Gift through which we believe that God exists and more...

1. **Not simply that God exists but also that**

- a. He is alive in you and me,
- b. He is always present, leading and guiding me
- c. He loves you and me in a way beyond our wildest imagination

- ii. **The world might ask:**

1. **How can you believe this stuff?**

- a. With all the evil and bad things that are happening...
 - i. Where is God?
- b. In light of what society tries to convince us of:
 - i. For those who think that only the visible, the measureable, the tangible is real
 - ii. The truth is only what can be proved scientifically
 - iii. For those who think the center of my life is me.....
 1. Faith seems to be an impossibility...or at least not worth the effort

- iii. **For you and me and all Christians:**

1. Faith is not just possible but at the very **heart of who we are as human beings....**it completes us a human beings

- a. Why? **Book of Genesis** teaches us that we are **made** in the image and likeness of God

- i. What does that mean?

1. We are made to be able to recognize God's voice, feel God's power, respond to God's Call
2. We are **made to be able to receive God and God makes the first move:**
 - a. Two ways:
 - i. He **reveals** Himself to us in so many **ordinary** ways
 - ii. Gives Himself to you and me in a **unique** way in **Jesus** the Son of God
 - b. **Faith is possible** because it is a Gift that is freely given by God
 - i. Point: God makes the first move....not you or me.

- iv. So today in Madrid, we have our own question for the world. We can ask:
 1. **How is it possible that you do not believe in the Lord?**
 - a. **For we cannot imagine anyone going through life without Jesus!!**

C. If Faith is a divine gift then it demands a response for you and me:

- i. **Divine gift-** you **cannot earn** it or achieve it on your own
 1. Holy Spirit is given to move our hearts to accept the revelation of God
- ii. It is in gift given and received in response to **hearing the offer of salvation preached**
 1. Passed on to us from others
- iii. **Demands a response:**
 1. Trust/submit to what we hear and respond with a **submission** of our lives is our free act to do or not to do
 - a. **It demands a fundamental choice** that every person is capable of making thousands of times each day.

D. As Christians, who have Faith in Jesus, our response is to God the Father in Him:

- i. **For in the eyes of the world,** Jesus is simply:
 1. A good man:
 2. A prophet
 3. A philosopher
 4. Someone "higher than the angels"

ii. **With the eyes of faith:**

1. Jesus is the **Incarnation** of the Son of God into our world
 - a. He is True God= the Son of God and True Man= the Son of Mary
 - b. “The Word Made Flesh and the Splendor of the Father” (as we say at Mass)
2. **He is our Redeemer** who freely gave His life on the Cross to set us free
 - a. The Cross
 - i. In the times of the Romans, it was the fate of slaves and traitors
 1. Because it was the **cruelest** way to die
 - a. Suffocation
 - ii. It was meant to inspire fear....in the face of the oppression of the state
 - b. **The Cross for Us as believers:**
 - i. **It is the greatest act of love** that the world has ever seen
 1. Jesus embraced THE MOMENT OF GREATEST CRUELTY and in LOVE, set us free from all cruelty, evil, sin and death!

iii. **Faith in Jesus: “it is not just a matter of believing things to be true....but discovering a personal relationship with Jesus” (Pope Benedict)**

1. Faith establishes a **Friendship with Jesus that will last forever**
 - a. **Friend:**
 - i. **Webster’s Dictionary:** “a person that one knows well and is fond of; intimate associate; close acquaintance”
 - ii. **Jesus’ definition** of a friend is very different:
 1. John 15:13: “Greater love than this has no man, that a man lay down his life for his friends”
 - a. “You are my friends if you do what I command you”
 - b. In the Gift of **Baptism**, this friendship began...

- i. On the day of your baptism, God **whispered** into your heart that you are so precious, he will love you forever
 - 1. No sin can ever stop Him from loving you
 - ii. On the day of your baptism, God found you so **beautiful** that he can't imagine the world without you
 - 1. No harm will ever come to you
 - iii. On the day of your baptism, God has **made you His Son and Daughter**: You are His Family
2. **Friendship with Jesus**: means something **bigger** than just you and me as individuals
- a. **It allows us into the Life of the Church**
 - i. The Church is more than an institution but it is also a **Great Community of believers**
 - 1. The word "Community" can mean different things, too:
 - a. **World's definition**: collection of people who share something in common
 - b. **Christian Definition**: people formed through sharing the same Spirit of the Risen Lord
 - b. **Another word to describe the Church is to say that We are members of the Family of God**
 - i. Story of my Father:
 - 1. "Blood is thicker than water"
 - ii. Baptism reminds us that as members of God's Family in Christ, "Grace is thicker than Blood"
 - 1. You and I are forever brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus and one another.
3. **The beauty of Catholic faith is that we discover that we are never alone**. Rather, we belong to each other, as brothers and sisters in the Church, forever
- a. **World Youth Day**: It is an experience of Church that will blow your mind away
 - i. Why? Our Catholic family extends to every continent, language, race and culture; even those who have gone before us in every age, time and place

- b. It is **“Facebook in the flesh”....a living, breathing reality**
 - i. At every turn you will have an offer of friendship because he is your brother or she is your sister
 - 1. Your success becomes my success
 - 2. Your tears become my tears
 - a. In the journey of faith, **we walk together with Jesus**

E. **When we allow the power of Faith, JESUS, to touch us**, then you and I are never going to be the same:

- i. **Our calling is clear: You and I are called:**
 - 1. **In this Life:**
 - a. **To become extraordinary, great in Jesus**
 - i. To allow our minds to be illuminated
 - ii. To have our hearts transformed in love
 - iii. To know real joy and fulfillment because you will always be OK....
 - 2. **In the life to Come:**
 - a. **To one day live in eternal glory in the Kingdom of Heaven**

F. I would be a liar if I said to you that it is easy to be a Person of faith:

- i. **There are challenges all around us:**
 - 1. **Challenges from Society:**
 - a. Popular Society has little room for God
 - i. Some people reject God openly
 - ii. Many more people simply ignore Him
 - 1. Example: The English phrase “God be with you” has now become simply “Good bye”
 - iii. They try to reduce God only to rules...
 - 1. They want to be free (they say)
 - b. Science/Technology wants you to think that believing is for those who want to keep their heads in the sand...
 - i. “just give me the proof”
 - ii. For them, being reasonable means that you don’t need to believe anything that you can’t prove
 - 2. **There are even challenges in our personal lives**
 - a. Our Hurts and Disappointments
 - b. Our Sufferings and Pains
 - c. Our Betrayals
 - d. Our Fears

- ii. **Before these challenges, we remember:**
 - 1. **The most important things in life are never easy**
 - 2. **The most important things in life are always worth fighting for**
 - 3. **The most important things in life can't be bought or sold, can't be measured or even seen**
 - a. And the Mystery of Love proves this!
- iii. As we look to Jesus in Faith, while sufferings are always hard, the **question that we must ask is never why do I suffer?**
 - a. Because no slave is greater than his Master
 - i. No student greater than His teacher
 - b. Because we are incomplete and mortal, everyone will face suffering at one time or another
- iv. The real question is: **How can I suffer well?**
 - 1. How can I overcome what is before me and become a better, more loving person?
 - a. Jesus is the answer...**BECAUSE HE WILL ALWAYS WALK WITH YOU**
 - b. **JESUS GIVES US EACH OTHER...**to face the challenges together
- v. 1 Cor 13:13: Saint Paul reminds us that three realities last:
 - 1. Faith, Hope and Love
 - a. And the greatest of these is LOVE

V. **Conclusion:**

A. **On the morning of Peter's Funeral**

- i. Our Spiritual Director called us together to speak with us;
 - 1. He said something strange:
 - a. Even though Peter was a priest for only five days, all spent in a hospital room, his life will touch more people than perhaps yours or mine if we lived for many more years"
- ii. Now that I am older and nearly 25 years have passed, I am beginning to glimpse what he meant:
 - 1. The Life of Faith is more powerful than any disease, any challenges, even death itself
 - a. **Faith will transform the world.....**
- iii. **My friends, may the same be said one day of you and me.**

- B. To the Lord Jesus, to Him who comes to us in faith and seeks to transform us into glory, be all power and glory, now and forever, amen.