



Encountering the Light of Faith

Lumen Fidei Online Retreat: Day 1

Retreat Guide



Retreat Introduction

During his Angelus message on Sunday, July 7, 2013, Pope Francis declared:

"As you know ... the Encyclical Letter on the theme of faith, entitled *Lumen Fidei*, 'the light of faith', was promulgated. For the Year of Faith, Pope Benedict XVI began this Encyclical, to follow up those on love and hope. I took up this great work and I brought it to conclusion. I offer it with joy to all the People of God: in fact, especially today, we all need to go to the essence of the Christian Faith, to deepen it and to confront it with our current problems. But I think that this Encyclical, at least in several places, can also be helpful to those in search of God and of the meaning of life. I place it in the hands of Mary, the perfect icon of faith, that she may bring forth the fruit desired by the Lord."

In light of the Pope's above-stated intention, the Archdiocese of Washington's Secretariat for Pastoral Ministry and Social Concerns and the Secretariat for Communications, have prepared this devotional, so as to encourage your growth in the joy of faith and your desire to share this joy, this faith, with others.

We offer this devotional, not to serve as a substitution for *Lumen Fidei*, but rather, so as to whet your appetite to discover its riches. Perhaps, if you haven't already, the following excerpts and spiritual exercises will inspire you to read the encyclical and share its light with others.

Peace to you!

*Share your experience on
Facebook and Twitter
#LumenFidei*

Lumen Fidei Summary

Lumen Fidei is the conclusion of a triptych of papal encyclicals on the theological virtues, beginning with Love in *Deus Caritas Est* ("God Is Love"), followed by Hope in *Spe Salvi* ("Saved by Hope"), and now "The Light of Faith". What is striking about *Lumen Fidei* is its emphasis on the act of faith, that is, trust in God's merciful love, an act whereby the Christian hears and believes the Word of God, sees and understands with the eyes and mind of Christ, and shares in Jesus' disposition as Son of the Father, because he or she shares in Jesus' love, which is the Spirit. The purpose of faith, then, is to illumine the totality of the believer's vision of the world, to transform the believer by God's free gift, which calls for humility and gratitude, and to make the believer a courageous beacon of Trinitarian Love that points the way to God for others.

Written to coincide with the Year of Faith, *Lumen Fidei* is a unique collaboration between Benedict XVI, who began the first draft as pope, and Pope Francis, who completed the encyclical and promulgated it on the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, June 29, 2013.

Lumen Fidei is divided into four chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion, as follows:

- A. Introduction (paragraphs 1-7)
- B. Chapter 1: We Have Believed in Love (1 Jn 4:16)
(paragraphs 8-22)
- C. Chapter 2: Unless You Believe, You Will Not Understand
(Is 7:9) (paragraphs 23-36)
- D. Chapter 3: I Delivered to You What I Also Received
(1 Cor 15:3) (paragraphs 37-49)
- E. Chapter 4: God Prepares a City for Them (Heb 11:16)
(paragraphs 50-57)
- F. Conclusion: Blessed is She Who Believed (Lk 1:45)
(paragraphs 58-60)

Composed in a warm and engaging, pastoral style, *Lumen Fidei* is meant not only to be read, but to be meditated upon - even *prayed* - so as to draw the reader into his or her own *personal encounter* with God.

Day 1 Theme:

My Encounter with the Light of Faith

Pope Francis begins his teaching on Faith by telling us about the light of faith. “The light of Faith: this is how the Church’s tradition speaks of the great gift brought by Jesus. In John’s Gospel, Christ says of himself: ‘I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness’ (John 12:46)... Those who believe, see; they see with a light that illumines their entire journey, for it comes from Christ, the morning star which never sets.”

(Lumen Fidei, 1)

The light of faith is the gift of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Pope Francis continues, “Faith is born of an encounter with the living God who calls us and reveals his love, a love which precedes us and upon which we can lean for security and for building our lives...” (LF, 4) Because faith is the gift of our encounter with the living God it also becomes our responsibility to engage in a vital relationship and build our life on this strong foundation.

Building a life on faith requires great trust in the reliable love of Jesus, a love which comes to us from the past and gives us a future by reuniting us to God and each other. “Believing means entrusting oneself to a merciful love which always accepts and pardons, which sustains and directs our lives, and which shows its power by its ability to make straight the crooked lines of our history.” (LF, 13)

Our encounter with the love of God in the light of faith is always an encounter with others as well. “Faith is God’s free gift, which calls for humility and the courage to trust and to entrust; it enables us to see the luminous path leading to the encounter of God and humanity: the history of salvation.” (LF, 14) We have faith because we believe the words and witness of someone else who introduced us to Jesus and because that personal encounter with him fills our deepest longing and illuminates the depths of our hearts.

Day 1:

Space for Reflection

1. Describe a time when you experienced a dark moment in your life. This would have been a time when you recognized that you were far from home, or enjoyed too much the show of the world; a time when you were away from faith and prayer was dry; when you had reached the limit of your abilities and could not see beyond today and you did not know the truth of peace.
2. Moments of darkness are gifts too. “We come to see that faith does not dwell in shadow and gloom; it is a light for our darkness.” (LF, 4) When we experience rejection or loss in our lives faith helps us to discover the depth of our need for God’s love and assures us that he is trustworthy and reliable. In those times and seasons of darkness we also share in the rejection of Jesus in his darkest hour. Have you considered the difficulties of life as a gift of faith? If so, how? If not, why?
3. The Gospel according to John 1:5 says that “the Light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.” Jesus is the light of faith and faith is a personal encounter with him. Jesus shares his mission to forgive sins, heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons with his disciples. In your time of great need, how have you experienced the encounter with the light of faith?
4. One of the great mysteries of faith is that the Holy Spirit works through us, imperfect people, to share an encounter with Jesus and awaken faith in others. Ask the Lord to open your eyes to share the light of his love with someone else today. Do you need to forgive someone for sinning against you or do you need to seek forgiveness for your own sin? Is there someone for whom you have promised to pray? Maybe you can answer a question for someone struggling with the faith. You can be a friend to someone going through a hard time. You can serve the hungry and visit the lonely. For whom can you let your light shine?



Encountering the Light of Faith

Lumen Fidei Online Retreat: Day 2

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Day 2 Theme:

The Creed: How can I say “I Believe?”

Pope Francis teaches us that in order to say “I believe,” to make a true act of faith, we must first recognize that it is impossible to say these words on our own. “It is impossible to believe on our own. Faith is not simply an individual decision which takes place in the depths of the believer’s heart, nor a completely private relationship between the “I” of the believer and the divine “Thou”, between an autonomous subject and God.” He continues, “Our belief is expressed in response to an invitation, to a word which must be heard and which is not my own; it exists as part of a dialogue and cannot be merely a profession originating in an individual,” (*Lumen Fidei*, 39.)

Faith is God’s initiative. He created, He saved us, and He is the one who gives us the words to profess faith in Him. The light of faith helps us to discover our true self, and reveals that our purpose in life is to be co-workers with God receiving our life as a gift from him, discovering our identity and his children, and walking by faith the path which leads to Him.

The realization that we do not come to faith on our own is not as strange as we might think, perhaps we have just forgotten it, “Persons always live in relationship. We come from others, we belong to others, and our lives are enlarged by our encounter with others.” (LF, 38)

No one is born into this world through his or her own means. We are all born of a woman, in a family. When I say “I” it is only because I have parents who were a “we,” without them “I” do not exist. “Even our own knowledge and self-awareness are relational; they are linked to others who have gone before us: in the first place, our parents, who gave us our life and our name. Language itself, the words by which we make sense of our lives and the world around us comes to us from others, preserved in the living memory of others.” (LF, 38)

Jesus, the Son of God, reveals to us that God is a “We” reflecting “the openness of God’s own love, which is not only a relationship between the Father and the Son, between an “I” and a “Thou”, but is also, in the Spirit, a “We”, a communion of persons.” *Lumen Fidei*, 39.

When we say “I Believe” we say these words in communion with God in his Church. “We can respond in the singular – “I believe”- only because we are part of a greater fellowship, only because we also say “We believe”. (LF, 39)

Day 2:

Space for Reflection

1. How do you respond to God's invitation of faith?
2. Where and with whom are you your most true self? How many "masks" do you carry around and how often do you change them?
3. How do you open the door of faith to others? Do I invite people to my home? Do I begin my meal with a prayer, even in public? Do I have lunch with others rather than alone at my desk? When was the last time you invited someone to come with you to Mass or an event at Church?
4. Is the concept of God as a "We" new to you? If so, how?



Encountering the Light of Faith

Lumen Fidei Online Retreat: Day 3

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Day 3 Theme:

Baptism: Discovering the Gift of Faith

"No one baptizes himself, just as no one comes into the world by himself. Baptism is something we receive" (*Lumen Fidei*, 41).

With these words, Pope Francis states something obvious: Just as there is no such thing as a "self-made human," just so, the "self-made Christian" does not exist. And yet, in a society where the "myth of individualism" reigns, what is obvious is not always common sense! Indeed, many "think that baptism is merely a way of symbolizing the confession of faith, a ... tool for those who require images and signs, while in itself ultimately unnecessary" (LF, 41).

However, is this true? Does it merely suffice to "accept Jesus as one's personal Lord and Savior" in order to become a Christian?

Jesus reveals God as "Our Father." This implies that being a Christian, being a disciple of Jesus, is being a member of God's family –a family in which the waters of Baptism are thicker than the blood of our natural families. Now, do you know anyone who can make a *unilateral decision* to join *someone else's* family? Just so, without God's gift, his "welcome" (cf. LF,43), it is impossible to become his sons and daughters. Baptism is the sign and sacrament of God's gift of a "new filial identity" (LF 42) - a new way of being and acting (implying a laying aside of the old way) - whereby "we become a new creation and God's adopted children" (LF 41).

For this reason, Pope Francis teaches: "Those who are baptized are set in a new context, entrusted to a new environment, a new and shared way of acting, in the Church. Baptism makes us see, then, that faith is not the achievement of isolated individuals; it is not an act which someone can perform on his own, but rather something which must be received by entering into the ecclesial [Church] communion which transmits God's gift" (LF 41).

Day 3:

Space for Reflection

1. Pope Francis, giving voice to Scripture and Catholic tradition, teaches us that "In baptism we become a new creation and God's adopted children" (LF, 41). As your faith has matured, how has your experience of being a child of God grown, and how has your trust in the Father's protective love affected your relationships and life's decisions?
2. Who brought you to baptism and who baptized you? Have you continued to maintain a relationship with your godparent(s), and with the priest (or deacon) who baptized you?
3. Were you given a baptismal (or saint's) name? What does this name (and saint) mean to you? How have they affected your experience and journey of faith?
4. How do you celebrate and renew your baptismal promises at Easter? Do you observe the anniversary of your baptism? How have your baptismal promises (i.e., your formal renunciation of sin and profession of faith) given shape to your experience and journey of faith?



Encountering the Light of Faith

Lumen Fidei Online Retreat: Day 4

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Day 4 Theme:

The Ten Commandments: How do I live faithfully?

Faith is a way of life. “Faith, as we have said, takes the form of a journey, a path to be followed, which begins with an encounter with the living God.” (*Lumen Fidei*, 46) When you meet the living God and entrust your life to him, you are changed forever. This means that your life takes on a new direction and you live differently, you live as a child of God.

The Ten Commandments or the Decalogue (Ten Words), is a sure and certain instruction by which we live our lives guided by the love of God, our Father, who has delivered us from the slavery of sin and death and made us children of the light. “The Decalogue is not a set of negative commands, but concrete directions for emerging from the desert of the selfish and self-enclosed ego in order to enter into dialogue with God, to be embraced by his mercy and then to bring that mercy to others.” (LF, 46)

The Ten Commandments, then, are a gift to believers because they reveal that we can be receptive to the experience of God’s transforming love for us. This means that when we obey God’s commandments we are living lives of thanksgiving for God’s love. “The Decalogue appears as the path of gratitude, the response of love, made possible because in faith we are receptive to the experience of God’s transforming love for us. And this path receives new light from Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. *Mt* 5-7).” (LF, 46)

- I am the LORD your God. You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.
- You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
- Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.
- Honor your father and your mother.
- You shall not kill.
- You shall not commit adultery.
- You shall not steal.
- You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.
- You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

Day 4:

Space for Reflection

1. Pope Francis teaches us that the Ten Commandments are not “a set of negative commands.” However, for the most part they start with “You shall not...” What does it mean to say the Ten Commandments are concrete directions for emerging from the desert of the selfish in order to enter into dialogue with God, to be embraced by his mercy, and then to bring his mercy to others?
2. How can we understand the Ten Commandments as the path of gratitude, the response of love, making us receptive to the love God has for us?
3. Take a few minutes to read Matthew chapter 5-7. Compare the words of Jesus with the Ten Commandments. What new light does Jesus bring to your understanding of the Ten Commandments?
4. When was the last time you experienced the grace of the sacrament of confession? The light is always on for you no matter how long you have been away; you do not be embarrassed or afraid to come to confession to hear the beautiful words, “I absolve you from your sins in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”



Encountering the Light of Faith

Lumen Fidei Online Retreat: Day 5

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Day 5 Theme:

Prayer: Faith is seeing and hearing

Think back to the day when Jorge Bergolio was elected Pope Francis. What was the first thing he asked of his children in faith? That we pray. That we pray for him, for each other and for the universal Church.

Faith is associated with both hearing and seeing because God enters into a relationship of love with man and speaks his word to him. Pope Francis also points to the fact that our human desire, once we have heard God's word, is accompanied by the desire to see his face. But how do the seeing and hearing come together? "The synthesis between hearing and seeing becomes possible through the person of Jesus Christ himself, who can be seen and heard." (*Lumen Fidei*, 30)

Through the gift of faith we have received in baptism, we have become children of God and are able to pray and to call God "Our Father".

Because we are given responsibility for our relationship with God and one another, we must nurture and take care of our relationships. Everyone wants to be told "I love you" including God, our Father. It is precisely through prayer that we listen to God and tell him that we love him.

Pope Francis states that, "the Lord's Prayer, the 'Our Father' is where Christians learn to share in Christ's own spiritual experience and to see all things through his eyes. From him who is light from light, the only-begotten Son of the Father, we come to know God and can thus kindle in others the desire to draw near to him." (LF, 46)

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Day 5:

Space for Reflection

1. How do you pray?
2. If you don't already pray on a regular basis, use this space to set a time each day to pray. When you wake up before your feet hit the floor say thank you to God for the new day. When you go to bed after your feet leave the floor say thank you to God for the day. 3:00pm, the Hour of Mercy, is a wonderful option to remember the gift of God's mercy each day.
3. The gift of having God as a Father means that we can speak to him any time we want. We can speak to him all day long like we speak to a friend, only God knows us better than we know ourselves. Do you have conversations with God? If not, what's keeping you from responding to his invitation?
4. How can praying the "Our Father", help you see with the eyes of Jesus?
5. How does prayer help us to kindle the light of faith in others?



Encountering the Light of Faith

Lumen Fidei Online Retreat: Day 6

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Day 6 Theme:

Marian Faith: Becoming a beacon of the Trinity

Pope Francis, quoting one of the early Christian martyrs, describes Mary as one who, "receiving the message of the angel, conceived 'faith and joy'" (*Lumen Fidei*, 58). Upon learning that she is "Mother of the Lord", however, Mary doesn't keep to herself, but goes to visit Elizabeth, who was pregnant with John the Baptist. In other words, Mary shows us, her children, the way of service - the sure sign that faith has, indeed, borne fruit in joy. For when faith is genuine and fruitful, it becomes a light to others - a beacon of God's love.

That said, Mary's isn't a "cheap" faith, but rather a "costly" faith - a faith that remains true not only in times of joy, but most especially during times of sorrow. Just try to imagine the agony of Mary, as she stands and beholds her own son, tortured and crucified. How can faith endure such testing? And yet, Mary's faith endures, the "yes" of her faith to the Angel Gabriel is the same "yes" of faith that takes Mary to Elizabeth, and keeps her at the cross! Thus Mary "is the perfect icon of faith; as Saint Elizabeth would say, 'Blessed is she who believed'" (LF 58).

Let us turn to Mary, our Mother in Christ, and ask her to teach us the way of service, the way of sharing our faith through love even when it costs us everything.

Prayer to Mary, Mother of the Church and Mother of Our Faith *(Lumen Fidei, 60)*

Mother, help our faith!

*Open our ears to hear God's word and to recognize his voice and call.
Awaken in us a desire to follow in his footsteps, to go forth from our own
land and to receive his promise. Help us to be touched by his love, that we
may touch him in faith. Help us to entrust ourselves fully to him and to
believe in his love, especially at times of trial,
beneath the shadow of the cross, when our faith is called to mature.
Sow in our faith the joy of the Risen One. Remind us that those who believe
are never alone. Teach us to see all things with the eyes of Jesus, that he may
be light for our path. And may this light of faith always increase in us, until
the dawn of that undying day which is Christ himself, your Son, our Lord!*
Amen.

Day 6:

Space for Reflection

1. What role does Mary play in your experience and journey of faith?
2. Imagine Mary at prayer. How might Mary teach you the ways of prayer, the way to grow in faith and experience joy in prayer?
3. How does the example of Mary sharing her faith and joy with Elizabeth invite you to share your faith as a beacon of God's love with your family, friends, neighbors, and others?
4. Reflect on Mary at the foot of the Cross. How does Mary's example help your faith to mature even in times of trial, and enlighten you with the wisdom to help others' faith mature?