YEAR OF FAITH 2012-2013

28th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME | October 13-14, 2012

I think that it would be safe to say that everyone --- every human person --- wants to belong, to be part of something bigger than themselves. I don't believe that idea would create too many arguments, although it's also probably safe to say that there will always be someone to disagree. Let's just take that idea at face value. On the flip side, the desire to belong is probably never stronger than when someone feels they don't belong, when they're not a part of something, when they are left alone. "I wasn't invited" . . . "no one ever asked me" ... "I guess they didn't want me" ... these are admissions that, no matter how brave or independent a face we put on, hurt a little or, maybe, a lot. Everybody wants to belong. It's human nature. Man is a social being. It's the way God created us.

Take a marriage or the family, for example. Love is the thing that binds them all together and conversely, when it's lacking, tears them apart. Take a business or workplace, for example. It's the product or service that unites and the failure to work and produce that fractures. The same with an organization and its common purpose and goals, a neighborhood with its neighborly respect, peace and security. I think you get the point.

As this idea of "belonging" applies to so many common experiences in life, I want to add one more: the Church. Look around you today. You see people you know, people you don't. People you like, perhaps some you don't. People from every walk of life, age, economic status, cultural or ethnic or racial background. People whose lives are going well, people who are carrying difficult burdens. Despite the variety and diversity and individuality that we see, something brought us all together at this moment that we cannot see: faith, our Catholic faith, the faith in which we all were baptized. We are a community of believers and we want to belong to our Church. For, you see, a Catholic never walks alone. God Himself is Father, Son and Holy Spirit --- a "community" of persons, a Holy Trinity. We are created in God's image. And furthermore, we are baptized in that Trinity, and through that baptism we "belong to God and to one another in this great Catholic Church of ours. We belong to a "community of faith."

About a year ago, Our Holy Father Benedict XVI announced that this current year would be a "Year of Faith" throughout the whole Catholic Church stretching from this weekend until the Solemn Feast of Christ the King, November 24, a year from now. He has given us a tremendous opportunity to think about, to pray about, to talk about and to celebrate the very thing that makes us belong, that creates us as a community, that unites us all: our Catholic faith. He proclaimed that this coming year would give renewed energy to the mission of the whole Church to lead men and women out of the desert they are in and toward the place of life: friendship with Christ who gives us the fullness of life ... a moment of grace and commitment to an even fuller conversion to God, to reinforce our faith in Him and to proclaim Him with joy to the people of our time (Benedict XVI, Homily, "Mass for the New Evangelization," October 16, 2011).

There is no better way to do that, to begin this "Year of Faith," than in and through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the Eucharist that is, as the Second Vatican Council, told us, "is the source and summit of the Christian life (Dogmatic Constitution o the Church Lumen Gentium, 11; Catechism of the Catholic Church 1324)."

In our Gospel reading today from St. Mark, we met a man who "wanted to belong." He was following the crowds listening to Jesus and he got caught up in all the enthusiasm. St. Mark tells us he ran up to Jesus, knelt down at his feet and questioned him, How can I belong? What do I need to do to inherit eternal life, to be part of all this, to belong to the Kingdom of God? St. Mark says Jesus reminded him about the teachings and commandments of his faith. The man responded to Jesus saying I've heard the teachings, I know the commandments and I have tried to live them. With great love, St. Mark observes, Jesus replied, only one more thing: give up everything for me. But the man was deflated and went away sad for his "possessions" were many.

We don't know whatever happened to the man. Did he do what Jesus asked and return? Or did he just give up? Scripture never tells us.

There are many Catholics who have left the Church, even some who still come. Their "possessions were many." I am not talking about financial or material goods. No, rather I am referring to those things that people hold on to and just won't give up that keep them from living their life of faith, from believing what the Church believes and teaches, from humbling saying maybe, just maybe, I need to swallow my pride and my opinions and stop taking all the short cuts believing this but not believing that. Maybe I don't know everything, maybe the prevailing culture has got it wrong, maybe, just maybe, it's not all about me. Maybe I have convinced myself I don't belong because I have convinced myself I don't believe.

This Year of Faith is a great opportunity for all of us. Pope Benedict has told us in that homily I mentioned earlier that "what the world is in particular need of today is the credible witness of people enlightened in mind and heart by the Word of the Lord and capable of opening the hearts and minds of many to the desire for God and for true life, life without end."

He's right. If we want to belong, we have to believe. And if we believe the faith of our baptism, we will belong, we will not walk away sad like the man in the Gospel because our "possessions are many." Don't stop believing.