

Porta Fidei Talk 1

Teaching – being awakened to God's Love

“For this reason, Catholic educators need a ‘formation of the heart’: they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love, so that their educational commitment becomes a consequence deriving from their faith.”

Educating Together in Catholic Schools, Paragraphs 25-26

Aims:

- Open up the first element of the Porte Fidei Retreat, the love God has for us.
- To give busy teachers and opportunity to receive
- To encourage them to be open to what God desires for them
- To share personal experiences of encountering God's Love

Because you are all so experienced, you could look at this analytically and take mental notes, trying to pick up ideas of what you can do with the young people in your schools, but let's leave that all aside for a while. The point of this retreat is for you to receive. We want to share with you what God is offering— friendship. God is not beyond our contact, but someone who loves us and wants to be in a personal relationship with us and wants to give us a better life. Jesus wants to do something for us in this retreat and program.

You as ‘professional God folk’

Your role can mean that you are very involved in something, such as running a retreat, and you may often have ‘near faith experiences’; that is, you are usually watching other people having faith experiences and ensuring that the program runs on time and that the next speaker is ready. However, this is not the same as having your own experience of God, so that is what this time is about.

Keep God at arm's length

Sometimes, it can be a very subtle defence mechanism to keep God at an arm's length because I'm a little nervous about what might happen if I let God get too close. So, you busy yourself with other things.

God will only take you as far as you let Him, but He does want to take us, so part of what we want to do is open up to that.

Faith as love received

From Porte Fidei 7, the document written by Pope Benedict XVI, that this retreat is based on:

“Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received”

Benedict very simply and beautifully goes to the heart of the matter. I want to help you open the door of faith, whatever that looks like for you, for everyone is at a different point on their journey. I want to help you open that door as open as you might like and as freely as you feel able. Let us tease out what faith as an experience of love received might look like.

More than an understanding of faith:

1. All about propositions, e.g. “We believe that God is true God and true man.”

- It has a place, but it's a second-level statement; there's a notion of faith that comes before that.
 - Intellectual
2. All-encompassing
- Something that encompasses your whole being
 - When you fall in love with somebody, you don't fall in love primarily with your head. There's undoubtedly an element of that, but that's not it entirely.
 - Not necessarily emotional, there will definitely be times when it would (*discuss examples*), but if we were to confine falling in love to only the emotional aspects, that would be selling the relationship short of the reality of love.

Faith is a way of loving, and it requires me to respond. We are going to look at what this means through some stories. The first is my story.

Personal story

Share your own story of how you came to find God. Ideas:

- Things that brought you to faith
- Head vs. heart
- Lead into talking about God's love and how you have seen that in your life
- Story of Matthew 13:44-46, of the man finding the treasure in a field and giving up everything and buying the field.

God love's everyone and one of the things about love, is you want to share it. The best example of this is 'singing in the rain', when the main character runs down the street singing because he's in love, irregardless of what other people are thinking. That's a natural thing when you fall in love.

This goes to the very heart of your vocation as teachers and your role in ministering to young people, that it's natural to want to share your faith with others

Second story – school teacher Michael

Tell a story of witnessing someone else experiencing God's love, for example:

Mike is a PE Teacher who grew up in a Catholic School and went to Church with his family for his whole life. We went to WYD to swap the cross from Australia to Germany. We went to Assisi to the Church of San Damiano and during the mass he was tearing up. Afterwards I caught up with him

1. I felt a love like I've never felt before
 - Because it's God loving us there's something mysterious and a little strange about that love, you know it is love, but more than that it's changing you in an incredible way. Directly upon the human heart.
2. I feel like my faith was 2D and now it's 3D
 - From a painting to a sculpture or something real and breathing.
 - Depth, he encountered it for himself.

It won't be everyone's experience, but the common denominator is the love that was never felt before and an encounter with the God who is revealed through Jesus.

Summary

Two simple stories. What I want you to take away is that we are talking about a love that can be known, experienced, and encountered, and that happens through the person of Christ. There's another line from *Porte Fidei* that takes this a little bit further.

"It's when the heart allows itself to be shaped by transforming grace."

In theology, grace is the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God is the love between the Father and the Son, so "this encounter happens when the heart allows itself to be shaped by love."

What does it mean to allow yourself to be shaped and transformed? This is at the heart of our retreat. Two things can prevent us from allowing ourselves to encounter God's love.

1. Turn it into an intellectual exercise or a 'work moment'. Too analytical.
2. Fear of what God might ask of us, we are cautious.

To allow oneself to be shaped by God's love, there's a simple but not necessarily easy moment of saying, "I'm open to a God who will protect me, care for me, and take me step by step on a journey." This requires trust that God is with us and not against us.

Use a metaphor to describe your journey of faith, for example:

When I was in Year 8, we could stay at the swimming pool after the Swimming carnival if we had permission from our parents and I did, so I stayed at the pool and the boys with the lockers above mine, said they would teach me how to dive off the 10m board if I wanted. I was very scared but it also sounded like a lot of fun, so I thought I would give it a go. When I got up there, they were teaching other people to backflip, so I just kinda had to go straight away, so I leap right off. I remember feeling like it was a really long way to the bottom and my fear just before I jumped, but also the rush as I was swim back up to the surface after the jump, filled with joy.

I want to suggest that this is a great image for a journey of faith, that there's something scary about taking these leaps and opening up, but just remember that the first words of Jesus after he was risen was always 'peace' and 'do not be afraid'. You don't have anything to be scared about, dive into the love that God has for you. Dive into it. Fall into the ocean of love. That's what we are looking at tonight and today as that is what we want to experience and what we want to share with the young people we work with.

In conclusion, let us reflect upon this quote:

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The role of the Catholic teacher begins with an encounter with God's Love (we need to be refilled) so that we can then share it with students and teachers. God calls each of us to an intimate relationship of love. Let's enter more deeply into that experience today.

