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One way to bring the Year of Faith to the pews

by Fr. Peter Daly

Parish Diary

The Year of Faith began in October. Pope Benedict is calling on the church to deepen our understanding so we can strengthen our witness.

I've always thought that faith was more about the heart than the head. Cardinal John Henry Newman reflected that idea in his motto, "*Cor ad cor loquitur*" ("Heart speaking unto heart"). That phrase reflects Newman's idea of both prayer and theology.

But Newman, the consummate intellectual, would be the first to remind the church that faith is not sentiment alone. There is also something to know. Faith is about the heart and the head.

My own archbishop, Cardinal Donald Wuerl, has pointed out that our weak instruction in the faith over recent decades has left Catholics poorly prepared to deal with the "tsunami of secularism" that has swept over our culture.

Preparing for this Year of Faith, I read an article in September's *America* magazine by David Impastato. He suggested that memorization of the basic elements of our faith can nourish our spiritual growth. By getting some basic things in our minds, we can help them take root in our hearts. Mr. Impastato gave a short list of "must-know" teaching and prayers for Catholics. His list included the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes and the Creed.

Over the past year, our daily Mass crowd has experienced this "head to heart" spirituality at morning Mass. About a year ago, we started saying Psalm 130, the "De Profundis," every morning to remember our beloved dead. Each day, I read the names of all the parishioners who have died on that particular day over the history of our parish. Then we say Psalm 130 -- "Out of the depths I cry unto you O Lord" -- followed by the prayer for the deceased: "Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord." We had the psalm and the

prayer printed up on cards that we leave in the pews. Over the course of the year, we have learned it by heart. We now have common words for our grief.

That experience got me thinking. Maybe we could learn other things that way? So I came up with 10 prayer cards, printed on both sides with things we want to commit to our heads during the Year of Faith. The 10 cards include the following:

1. The beatitudes and the Ten Commandments.
2. The corporal and spiritual works of mercy.
3. The seven deadly sins and the seven life-giving virtues.
4. The gifts of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11) and the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

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5. The books of the Old Testament and New Testament grouped by type.
6. The canticle of Zechariah (Luke 1:68-79) and the canticle of Mary (Luke 1:46-55).
7. The Our Father, the Hail Mary and the Glory Be.
8. The 20 mysteries of the rosary: joyful, glorious, sorrowful and luminous.
9. Psalm 23 ("The Lord is my shepherd") and the Apostles' Creed.
10. Psalm 130 ("Out of the depths") and the prayer for the deceased.

Very pleased with myself, I announced this idea to the parish at Mass on the first Sunday of October and said we would be distributing the cards over the year. After Mass, a young girl, a freshman in high school, came up to me and said, "You forgot one card."

A little surprised, I asked her, "What did I forget?"

"You forgot the Great Commandment."

Then she recited it by heart: "Hear O Israel, The Lord our God is Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul, and all your mind and all your strength. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Shamefaced, I said, "You're right."

So it looks like we will have at least 11 cards. No. 11 will be the Great Commandment on one side and the Great Commission ("Go and teach all nations") on the other side. This last card reminds me that priests should listen to their people.

This prayer card catechism is a flexible thing. These little bite-sized bits of our tradition could be expanded to teach things like the parts of the Mass or quotes from the Bible. Maybe we should have a card with the first chapter of John's Gospel ("In the beginning was the word"), or passages from St. Paul, like 1 Corinthians 13, the famous hymn discourse on love. A card with night prayer and the Canticle of

Simeon ("Now you dismiss your servant") would also be a good idea.

Our goal is not to memorize a bunch of words. Our goal is to engrave the faith on our hearts, as Ezekiel would say. Then in moments of joy or sorrow, perplexity or opportunity, we would have the words to give voice to our faith.

Of course, that is only a start. Ultimately knowing should lead us to doing.

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