

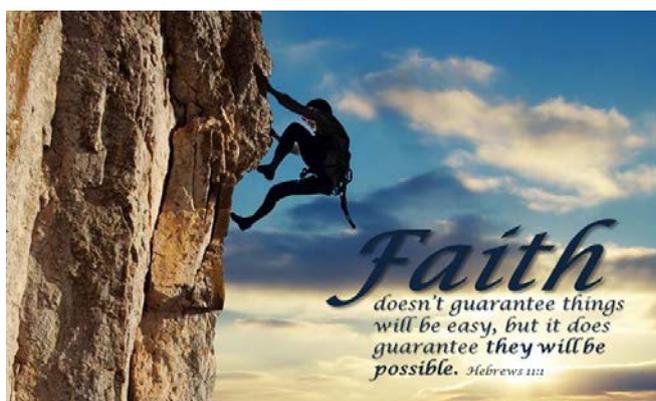
E-BULLETIN #77

"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)

item 145

Faith in God is Alive: *Fides in Deum vivum*

Whoever said Faith is dead? That religion has become obsolete, irrelevant and burdensome? Faith is still alive and kicking. It's only that its address has changed. It has a new portal. In fact man cannot live without some kind of faith or other: now and for aye.



True, fewer people go to Church. Few believe in God. Few profess a religion. But it does not follow therefore that faith is dead-*Non sequitor*. Many of those who believed in God earlier have now just switched to the forces of the universe as expounded in the bestseller *The Secret*. Many who have given up the Jesus of Nazareth are ready to believe in the Jesus of Kashmir if the media proclaim him. If they cannot accept Mary Magdalene as a devout disciple of Christ as the gospels testify they readily welcome her as his mistress or wife if *The Da Vinci Code* or some

mysteriously discovered little fragment of papyrus in the ancient excavations says so.

If, for centuries, people of all faiths found solace in believing in God, now it is time to move on to adopt the *willing suspension of disbelief* in Richard Dawkins, high priest of secularism who categorically declares that *God is a delusion*. That is the New Gospel liberating those who were reeling under the oppression of Atheism, Agnosticism and Secularism.

The world has already ended a number of times in living memory, according to the prophets of the media. The latest we know was the Mayan Calendar date of December 21, 2012. The date was awaited with much trepidation just like the packed-up Corinthians in Paul's time awaiting the Second Coming of Christ. The appointed date in December came and went, leaving us unscathed. What went wrong? Oh, it was some miscalculation.

The New Creed of Modernization says parents and teachers are not to be trusted. But you can repose all your faith in SMS, email and Facebook friends. One fine morning you get an email or cell-phone message that you have won \$1,000,000 in a lottery in the U.S. Just give your bank or credit card particulars and some Aladdin from Nigeria will open the door to his legendary cave for you, the chosen one.

Or, you are a teenage girl with overprotective parents. Your glamorous male friend on Facebook is the Spiderman ready to liberate you from the home cage and launch you on a grand career. Just meet him

unaccompanied at a restaurant away from home. And don't be silly enough to inform your parents, who will play spoilsport. Hundreds of young Indian girls have bitten this bait and tasted the bitter chocolate of brothel bondage.

Traditional wisdom says money does not grow on trees but surely it does so in Ponzi schemes. Invest in this money-spinner and your money will yield amazing returns. Buy a share of Rupees 1,000 and get a fabulous monthly interest. What a boon! You invest, and presto, your promised interest materializes. Why should you alone enjoy this windfall? You rope in your dearest friends and relatives and they join the scheme too. Then, suddenly, the interest payment blinks out and the masters of the scheme vanish into thin air with your principle. This wonder happens again and again every few years. And it is an unfailingly roaring success because people believe they deserve the best as the advertisements say.

So when will the faith cease? When will the world end? Wait for the media to tell us like the dogged musicians on the fast sinking Titanic who went down playing "Nearer my God to Thee" in the final moments of the disaster.

Inferring from the preceding lines, a claim is being made: Faith in God will never cease to exist although those prophets of the mass media of "illusion" will cease to exist. The prophet of the Mayan Sect could not beckon the world to its close at his whims and fancies since the former is not the author of the Universe. These Godless men or "stupid men" or senseless men" of modernity (Psalm 14:1; 92:6-7) seem to propose many "idols" of insecure faith in place of the true faith in God. Nevertheless, these idols pursue "a plethora of paths leading nowhere" (**Pope Francis**, Encyclical Letter, *Lumen Fidei*, para.13) and idolatry would not be able to *turn vice into virtue, thievery into honor, brutality into patriotism and sadism into justice since idol worship is an absence of a divine character in the mortals* who are ruled by darkness which diminishes the full meaning of human existence. This perennial godlessness of the *polis* (peoples), if you like, are the "hollow men" of Eliot's phrase. In the words of Isaiah, they are "lovers of ashes" (Isaiah 44:20).

To strengthen the thesis that faith in God is still alive, I draw my inspiration from St Paul who tells the Areopagus (Acts 17:27), that Man, who is God's image, cannot fail to find God just below the surface of his works. Nonetheless, "God and humanity are co-relative terms." (Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 9, p.28). Whatever we say about God says something about human persons, and whatever we say about ourselves says something about God. The object of all theology and spirituality is not God as such, but man as related to God. Reducing everything to human experience alone (*reductionism*), nullifies the humanity. Thus to choose existence without God is to choose non-existence. It is to fall into absurdity.

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item 146

Bergoglio, the day of Lampedusa

Pope blasts indifference over migration deaths

Pope Francis on Monday denounced the "globalization of indifference" that greets migrants who risk their lives trying to reach Europe, as he traveled to the farthest reaches of Italy to draw attention to their plight and to pray for those who never made it.

The tiny Sicilian island of Lampedusa, a treeless, strip of rock nine kilometers (four miles) long, is closer to Africa than the Italian mainland and is the main port of entry into Europe for African migrants smuggled by boat from Libya or Tunisia.



Francis decided last week to visit Lampedusa as his first pastoral visit outside of Rome, spurred by a particularly deadly crossing in which a dozen migrants lost their lives. Despite the spur-of-the-moment decision, the island came through, building a makeshift altar out of recycled wood from shipwrecked migrants boats.

Francis greeted newly arrived migrants, and during Mass on the island's sports field, thanked the residents for welcoming so many

men and women over the years. He prayed for those who died trying to make a better life for themselves and their families.

"Who wept for these people who were aboard the boat?" Francis asked in his homily. "For the young mothers who brought their babies? For these men who wanted to support their families?"

"We are a society that has forgotten how to cry," he said. Dozens of Lampedusan fishing boats accompanied Francis' coast guard ship as it pulled into port, a seaborne motorcade to honor the first pope to visit an island that often complains it has been forgotten by Europe as it processes the thousands of would-be immigrants who come ashore each year.

"Pope Francis, only you can save us," read a banner on one of the boats. "You're one of us," said a spray-painted sign hanging from an apartment building overlooking the port.

As his plane was landing, a boat carrying 162 Eritreans arrived in port, the latest in a new wave of migrants taking advantage of calm seas and warm weather to make the treacherous crossing. Officials said they were in good condition, just cold.

Francis, whose ancestors immigrated to Argentina from Italy, has a special place in his heart for refugees: As archbishop of Buenos Aires, he denounced the exploitation of migrants as "slavery" and said those who did nothing to help them were complicit by their silence.

He repeated that message on Monday, denouncing smugglers who take advantage of the poverty of migrants to enrich themselves. While thanking the work of Lampedusans and volunteers who care for the newly arrived migrants, he challenged everyone to take responsibility for the migrants' desperation, urging them not to have "anesthesia of the heart."

"The culture of our own well-being makes us insensitive to the cries of others," he said. "It brings us to feeling indifferent to others, to the globalization of indifference."

He prayed that God forgives such indifference, and welcoming Muslim migrants in the crowd, wished them a good start of the holy month of Ramadan. "The church is with you in the search for a more dignified life for you and your families," he said.

Francis has said he wants his to be a missionary church, one that goes to the "peripheries" to minister to the most marginal.

It was appropriate then that he choose Lampedusa as his first pastoral visit outside Rome, and its residents welcomed him warmly, shouting "Viva il Papa" and wildly waving the yellow and white flags of the Vatican.

"It was not even thinkable that the pope would come to an Island like this one," said resident Andrea Pavia, who came out with his tearful wife and daughter to watch the pope drive by. "I am so happy, I am so emotional. I just can't believe it."

As he pulled into port, Francis blessed a wreath of yellow and white flowers and tossed it into the sea in memory of those migrants who died. He then disembarked and greeted a few dozen migrants one by one, stopping to chat with a few.

In yet another indication of how Francis is changing the rules of this papacy, he traveled by open-top vehicle through throngs of well-wishers, shunning the bullet-proof popemobile that popes usually use when outside the Vatican.

The Mass site was located near the "boat cemetery" that houses the remains of broken migrant ships that have reached Lampedusa's rocky shores.



Recycled wood from those vessels were used for Mass: A small, painted boat was turned into the altar, the lectern was made out of a recycled ship's helm and pieces of driftwood, and a pieces of wood were crafted into Francis' pastoral staff and the chalice used at Mass. Officials have said the simple nature of the Mass was in keeping with his express wish.

According to the U.N. refugee agency, 8,400 migrants landed in Italy and Malta in the first six months of the year, almost double the 4,500 who arrived during the first half of 2012. It's still a far cry from the tens of thousands who flooded to Italy during the Arab Spring exodus of 2011.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees has recorded 40 deaths in the first half of 2013, and a total of 500 for all of 2012, based on interviews with survivors. Fortress Europe, an Italian observatory that tracks migrant deaths reported by the media, says about 6,450 people died in the Canal of Sicily between 1994 and 2012.

Vatican Insider
14.07.13



you commented...

on #75

Again some inspiring reading. Wonderful to hear a little of where you are Pricilla and the great story of the hospital – a long way from where we met when you were so hospitable to all who came to the Procura in Rome. Then Sr Clare Condon’s article on servant leadership. I was particularly struck by the phrase “ To be a source of empowerment so that others assume their leadership”. It struck a deep cord in me of the particular call of leadership in the vision of Vincent, always empowering others to live their vocation fully. Many years ago a wise Pallottine priest (whose ordination anniversary is today 9 July – the day I am writing) said that if we leave a position (including one of leadership) and people notice we have gone, then we have not lived poverty or the spirit of Vincent. So many thanks for the reminder.

CS 10.07.13

thanks for the latest E-Bulletin. I attended a Good Sam secondary school so I'm always interested in what they're up to. South African news good too. We hosted a German girl years ago and when she returned home she joined the Pallottine Missionary Sisters and was sent to that hospital. So that was a connection too.

PH 10.07.13

on #76