

**Homily for Mass for the Bishop's Gift Society Banquet  
Christ the King Church, Springfield**

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Reverend Monsignors and Fathers, Deacons, consecrated men and women, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, having come now to the end of the summer months and the beginning of the academic year, many of us still have clear in our minds thoughts of trips and vacations recently completed. Such journeys usually include unplanned occurrences and are often accompanied by questions such as, "Are we there yet?" Most parents dread that question, but it is an important question because it implies that we know where we are going (which isn't always the case).

In J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, the Hobbit Bilbo Baggins says to his nephew, "It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step into the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to."<sup>1</sup> Most of us seek to journey through life keeping our feet, that is, by planning out each leg of the journey and avoiding whatever pitfalls and detours we can foresee.

As you no doubt know, the Holy Father Benedict XVI has proclaimed a Year of Faith to begin this October 11<sup>th</sup> and conclude on the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Universal King, November 24, 2013. In his Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* – The Door of Faith – in which he announced the Year of Faith, he writes:

The “door of faith” (Acts 14:27) is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church. It is possible to cross that threshold when the word of God is proclaimed and the heart allows itself to be shaped by transforming grace. To enter through that door is to set out on a journey that lasts a lifetime. It begins with baptism (cf. Romans 6:4), through which we can address God as Father, and it ends with the passage through death to eternal life, fruit of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, whose will it was, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, to draw those who believe in him into his own glory (cf. John 17:22).<sup>2</sup>

If we are to be shaped by transforming grace we must lose our feet, as it were. We are not the guides along this journey and we do not know every

bump along the way; but the Lord Jesus does, for he is himself “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

Bilbo, of course, is right when he says that if we lose our feet there’s no knowing where we’ll be swept off to. We know that the ultimate gift of faith is eternal life on high with Jesus Christ, but the road upon which each of us must travel is different because the Lord calls each of us to holiness through different means and through different vocations. We also know, though, that if we do lose our feet, “to the extent that he freely cooperates, man’s thoughts and affections, mentality and conduct are slowly purified and transformed, on a journey that is never completely finished in this life.”<sup>3</sup> The task for each of us is to allow ourselves, by faith, to be swept up into the great mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; we must lose our feet and follow after him who died and rose for us.

By faith, we can lose our feet on this journey without fear because we know where we are going; we know that we make our pilgrim way to the house of the Father where a room has been prepared for us. Although the road on which we walk may take us to unexpected places and have a few bumps we, on our own, would have sought to avoid, the Lord knows what

he is doing and he knows best how we will grow in faith, in hope, and in love. No matter what we encounter on this road we know that “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

By faith, we can lose our feet because we do not travel this road on our own; we are not only led by the Lord who has travelled this road before us, but our brothers and sisters in Christ are on their way with us; we make our way together. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian; we are all one in the Body of Christ.

By faith, we can lose our feet and share the gift we have received; indeed, faith must be shared if it is authentic. We must share our faith not only to encourage our brothers and sisters, but also to lead all men and women to Jesus Christ so that they might receive the same gift that has been given to us. Sharing our faith is sometimes intimidating because we do not think our faith is strong enough to share.

With the Apostles, we say to Jesus, “Increase our faith” (Luke 17:5)! And he says to us, “By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples” (John 15:8). Faith increases when it bears much fruit, when it is shared.

Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy. It makes us fruitful, because it expands our hearts in hope and enables us to bear life-giving witness: indeed, it opens the hearts and minds of those who listen to respond to the Lord’s invitation to adhere to his word and become his disciples.<sup>4</sup>

In this upcoming Year of Faith, we pray the Lord will strengthen and increase the gift he has given us that we may lose our feet and go and bear fruit that will last.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring: Being the First Part of The Lord of the Rings* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1994), 72.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, 7.