

# Year of Faith

Issue Number 6

St Ethelbert's Parish, Deane, Bolton



## Why doesn't the Church give more money to the poor?

A long-standing charge is the so-called wealth of the Catholic church. The church does in fact own many buildings and the property on which they stand, as well as many valuable works of art. Yet this net worth is not liquid, that is, it is not easily converted into cash. Also those things - buildings, property, and art - are used by the poor and for the poor. For example, Catholic schools are part of the largest voluntary aided school system in the world, at an enormous savings to tax-payers. Countless hospitals, orphanages, nursing homes, churches to worship in, and similar agencies serve millions of people, many of them poor or non-Catholic. Catholic Charities is the largest charitable organization in the world. Its many agencies directly serve the poor and those on the margins of society. In Africa, over 30% of all AID's victims and their families are cared for by Catholic organisations and health facilities. Vatican City itself is an art museum. People of all faiths can go there to enjoy and appreciate the beautiful achievements of some of humanity's greatest artists. Beautiful cathedrals, priceless art, sculpture, and similar works all over the world give testimony to the human spirit and its love for God. They are tangible signs of the faith of people whose creative efforts reflect the glory of a brilliant Creator. Humanity would be lacking if the church divested itself of these treasures, which are meant for the ages. Incidentally, someone once estimated that if the church sold all its art works and gave the proceeds to the impoverished, each poor person would receive about 16 pence. In reality, the Vatican as well as many dioceses around the world are operating at a deficit. The situation is, of course, even more serious in the extreme poverty areas of the world. Your question is a good one, though. Through the ages, some in the church have misused its resources. We can not excuse these abuses. Jesus identified very strongly with the poor and calls all people to be generous to the poor (see Mt 25). When we respond to the needs of the poor we are responding to Jesus himself. Each of us is a member of Christ's body. St. Ignatius of Loyola stated well the challenge before all Christians: What have you done for Christ? What are you doing for Christ? What will you do for Christ?"

### In this Issue:

#### IS THE CHURCH RICH?

The church is so rich. Why doesn't it sell some of its property and valuables and give more money to the poor?

#### HEARD THE NEWS?

Jesus is God.  
Do you believe this?

#### FAITH TODAY?

Faith is a gift of God, but it is also a profoundly free and human act...



## Have You Heard The News?

The most basic content of evangelization is the breathtaking assertion that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. From this assertion flows another equally astounding bit of good news: Jesus is who he said he was. Though it is all the vogue in academic circles today to say that Jesus was put to death because he befriended the marginalized or upset the social conventions of his time, the fact is that he was executed because he consistently spoke and acted in the very person of God. The most basic charge against Jesus was not political insurrection but blasphemy. What impressed the first Christians to a life-changing degree was how the resurrection validated the extraordinary claims of Jesus concerning himself. But what precisely were these claims? Before healing the paralyzed man, Jesus said matter-of-factly, “my son, your sins are forgiven.” Shocked, the Pharisees responded, “how could this man say such a thing? Only

God can forgive sins.” They were right, of course, which is the whole point. If you had hurt me, I could with some legitimacy offer you my personal forgiveness; but if someone else had harmed you, I could scarcely offer that person my forgiveness for his sin against you. The only way that such a statement could be anything but blasphemous would be if I were the one who is offended in every sin, only if I were God. And this is just what the Pharisees correctly intuited. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus makes the jaw-dropping announcement: “unless you love me more than your mother and your father, more than your very life, you are not worthy of me.” At the limit, we could imagine a religious leader or founder saying something like, “you must love God more than your very life,” or perhaps, “you should reverence my ideas more than you do your father or mother.” But Jesus said that he himself must be loved above even the greatest values in this world,

implying thereby that his person is itself the highest Good. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus ecstatically declared, “heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall never pass away.” Who could coherently utter such a statement except the one who is himself the very incarnation of the eternal Word of God? What Jesus’ claims about himself rule out—as C.S. Lewis so clearly saw—is the bland middle position that, though he isn’t divine, he is a kindly and wise ethical teacher, one inspiring religious figure among many. If he isn’t who he says he is, he isn’t admirable at all, and this is why Jesus, more than any other of the religious founders, compels a choice. The Buddha claimed to have found a spiritually liberating path; but Jesus said, “I am the way;” Mohammed could say that, through him, the final divine truth had been communicated to the world, but Jesus said, “I am the truth;” Confucius could maintain that he had discovered a

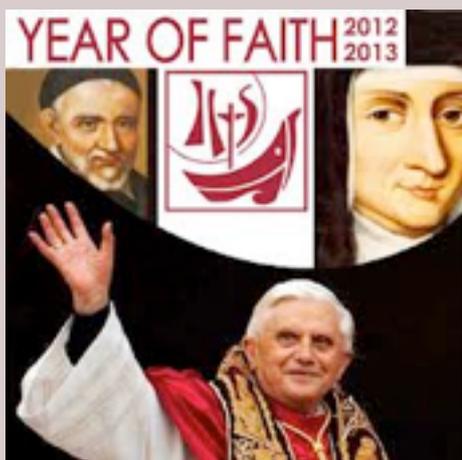
new and uplifting form of life, but Jesus said, “I am the life.” Neither the Buddha, nor Mohammed, nor Confucius, nor Moses ever claimed to be God—and this is to their infinite credit. But Jesus did, and therefore, we have to decide: are we with him or against him? Do you believe that Jesus is God? If you don’t, you’re not a Christian. If you do, you must make Jesus Christ the Lord of your life, and you must declare him in season and out. You must, in a word, evangelize.

Father Robert Barron



## What does it mean to believe?

Does faith still make sense in a world where science and technology have opened horizons heretofore unimagined? What does it mean to believe today?



“Faith is not simply a matter of man’s intellectual assent to truths about God; it is an act whereby I freely entrust myself to a God who is a Father and who loves me; it means clinging to a “Thou” who gives me hope and confidence. To be sure, this adherence to God is not devoid of content: it enables us to know that God himself revealed himself to us in Christ. He showed us his face and he truly drew near to each one of us. Indeed, God revealed that his love

for man, for each one of us, is without measure: on the Cross, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God made man, shows us in the clearest fashion how far this love goes -- to the point of giving himself, to total sacrifice. By the mystery of the Death and Resurrection of Christ, God descends into the depths of our humanity in order to bring it back to himself, to raise it to his heights.”

[Pope Benedict XVI]