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Highlights from Pope Francis? first encyclical

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Pope Francis

VATICAN CITY -- Less than four months after being elected, Pope Francis published his first encyclical on Friday (July 5).

But the 82-page ?Lumen Fidei,? (?The Light of Faith?) is only partially Francis? work. As Francis himself told a group of cardinals and bishops in May, the encyclical was written ?with four hands? together with retired Pope Benedict XVI.

Benedict had almost finished the text when he resigned on Feb. 28. Francis took up the unfinished work, adding a ?few contributions? to Benedict?s ?fine work? and publishing it under his own name.

Further underlining the agreement between the two popes with markedly different styles, the two popes on Friday appeared together at a Vatican ceremony. The two men embraced warmly and sat side by side throughout the event.

With its frequent quotations from German philosophers, ?Lumen Fidei? echoes the themes and buzzwords of Benedict?s pontificate, emphasizing the importance of reasserting the truth of Christian faith against a modern culture marked by ?relativism.?

Yet it also reflects Francis? subtle outreach to nonbelievers, saying they can find God in the search for and experience of love.

?To the seeker Francis says: don?t be afraid of using your intellect, see what love might teach you about faith, and stay on the path,? said the Rev. James Martin, editor at large of the Jesuit weekly America. ?Then one day, you may be surprised to discover that you are in a relationship with God and, more important, that God is in a relationship with you.?

In the encyclical, the two popes say that in the modern world, faith ? which had always been associated with the ?light? illuminating man?s journey on earth ? ?came to be associated with darkness,? while reason became the main avenue for men to reach enlightenment.

Yet in the past century, mankind has come to understand that the ?light of autonomous reason is not enough to illumine the future.? For this reason, the two popes urge humanity to ?see once again that faith is a light, for once the flame of faith dies out, all other lights begin to dim.?

The truth of faith, however, shouldn?t make believers ?presumptuous? or ?inflexible.? Echoing one of Francis? favorite themes, the encyclical stresses that the ?security of faith sets us on a journey; it enables witness and dialogue with all.?

From the encyclical:

An ?illusory light?

?Speaking of the light of faith, we can almost hear the objections of many of our contemporaries. In modernity, that light might have been considered sufficient for societies of old, but was felt to be of no use for new times, for a humanity come of age, proud of its rationality and anxious to explore the future in novel ways. Faith thus appeared to some as an illusory light, preventing mankind from boldly setting out in quest of knowledge.?

?Faith is not a private matter?

?Faith is not a private matter, a completely individualistic notion or a personal opinion: it comes from hearing, and it is meant to find expression in words and to be proclaimed.?

?Faith without truth?

?Faith without truth does not save, it does not provide a sure footing. It remains a beautiful story, the projection of our deep yearning for happiness, something capable of satisfying us to the extent that we are willing to deceive ourselves. Either that, or it is reduced to a lofty sentiment which brings consolation and cheer, yet remains prey to the vagaries of our spirit and the changing seasons, incapable of sustaining a steady journey through life.?

?Truth also needs love?

?If love needs truth, truth also needs love. Love and truth are inseparable. Without love, truth becomes cold, impersonal and oppressive for people?s day-to-day lives.?

?The security of faith?

?One who believes may not be presumptuous; on the contrary, truth leads to humility, since believers know that, rather than ourselves possessing truth, it is truth which embraces and possesses us. Far from making us inflexible, the security of faith sets us on a journey; it enables witness and dialogue with all.?

?They are already ? on the path leading to faith?

?Because faith is a way, it also has to do with the lives of those men and women who, though not believers, nonetheless desire to believe and continue to seek. To the extent that they are sincerely open to love and set out with whatever light they can find, they are already, even without knowing it, on the path leading to faith.?

?The need for vigilance?

?Because all the articles of faith are interconnected, to deny one of them, even of those that seem least important, is tantamount to distorting the whole. Each period of history can find this or that point of faith easier or harder to accept: hence the need for vigilance in ensuring that the deposit of faith is passed on in its entirety.?

?Faith does not draw us away from the world?

?The light of faith is concretely placed at the service of justice, law and peace ? Faith does not draw us away from the world or prove irrelevant to the concrete concerns of the men and women of our time.?

?No refuge for the fainthearted?

?Faith is no refuge for the fainthearted, but something which enhances our lives.?

?A lamp which guides our steps?

?Faith is not a light which scatters all our darkness, but a lamp which guides our steps in the night and suffices for the journey.?

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