

Introduction

The title *Open Wide the Doors to Christ* was chosen for this book because it speaks so directly and powerfully to what it means to be a Christian in our modern world today. In fact, it was with these simple yet profound words “Open wide the doors to Christ” that *both* Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI began their ministries which would lead the Church into the Third Millennium. What does it mean to open wide the doors to Christ? How does this invite us to live our calling as his followers?

I would like to begin with the words of Pope Benedict XVI as he concluded his homily during his first Mass as Pope. This homily serves as a mission statement, not only for his ministry on which he is embarking, but also as the mission for the entire Church. Let us start by reflecting on these powerful words of Benedict XVI:

At this point, my thoughts return to 22 October 1978, when Pope John Paul II began his ministry here in Saint Peter's Square. His words on that occasion constantly echo in my ears: "Do not be afraid! Open wide the doors to Christ!"

The Pope was addressing the mighty, the powerful of this world, who feared that Christ might take away something of their power if they were to let him in, if they were to allow the faith to be free...The Pope was also speaking to everyone, especially the young. Are we not perhaps all afraid in some way? If we let Christ enter fully into our lives, if we open ourselves totally to him, are we not afraid that he might take something away from us? Are we not perhaps afraid to give up something significant, something unique, something that makes life so beautiful? Do we not then risk ending up diminished and deprived of our freedom?

And once again the Pope said: No! If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation.

And so, today, with great strength and great conviction, on the basis of long personal experience of life, I say to you, dear young people: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ — and you will find true life. Amen.

Pope Benedict XVI's words so beautifully call us to completely open ourselves to Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Our modern culture presents for us a strange dualism. On the one hand it seeks to solve and understand the deepest meaning of the universe, the world around us, the purpose and meaning of life, and our existence as human beings. But at the same time, it often presents a culture of fear, and of hopelessness and death.

As Pope John Paul II so powerfully expressed in his first encyclical letter in 1979, *The Redeemer of Man*: Christ is the answer! He is the one who comes to reveal to us the fullness of truth, the truth about God and the truth about ourselves. He is the answer only if we open ourselves fully to him.

Pope John Paul II not only taught this but he *lived* it. He showed us that there is nothing to fear in embracing Christ, no matter what life throws at you. His life witnessed to us that only in Christ is it possible for a humble man from Poland to take the world by storm. His life was evidence that one could face the fears and tragedies of life, even an assassin's bullet, and still experience and express the love of God. He proved that through Christ, love and peace could conquer the seemingly invincible evil of communism. And finally, in his last days, he witnessed to the world that only in Christ is death the beautiful sleep through which we awaken into eternal life.

Following his example, *what is there to be afraid of? What do we have to lose?* We must open wide the doors to Christ and to the beauty and power of his truth, so that we may truly find the meaning of life. This is the message and mission that we must all take to our modern culture: in Christ there is only life and truth! Coming into contact with the truth of Christ and believing it is like breathing pure oxygen, and once you get a breath of it, you do not forget it.

Many people have given into the temptation of watering down the truth, either through fear of proclaiming it or lack of understanding it. They have abandoned or forgotten the richness of the 2,000 plus years of Christian Tradition handed down through the Church. Many adult

Catholics do not know their faith, and are missing out on the beauty and true freedom that is Catholicism because of the fear of embracing the truth and embracing Christ. In many catechetical circles, Catholicism has lost its radiant beauty and power and has become quite benign, and often taken the form of a purely cultural phenomenon. The time has come at the dawn of the New Evangelization envisioned by Pope John Paul II to reclaim this beauty and power of the Catholic faith especially in the areas of catechesis and evangelization. The time has truly come: *“Do not be not afraid! Open wide the doors to Christ!”*

It is in light of this calling of the Church that I present this book as a very thorough and detailed presentation of the faith. It will enable its readers, whether they are in the process of becoming Catholic, or are already Catholic, to experience for the first time, or once again, the transforming power of the truth of Christ. While it is not an exhaustive presentation of the teachings of the Church, this book is written to present the foundational truths of Catholicism, the “meat and potatoes” of the faith, so that its readers can be truly grounded and immersed in what it means to be Catholic. It is intended to be an introduction to, and a presentation of, the Church’s teachings on the Creed, the sacraments, the moral life, and prayer. Its particular focus is upon those who are learning and seeking to become Catholic.

Included with each chapter are the sections of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* which addresses the material covered, so that one can continue his or her learning. This book also presents the Catholic faith in a way that adults can understand, while at the same time challenging its readers to dig deeper and to hopefully continue to grow in the understanding of their faith.

The material is 100% faithful to the teachings of the Catholic Church and, as one will see, does not shy away from even the most difficult and counter-cultural teachings of Christ and his Church. For what do we have to be afraid of? It is the truth that sets us free! Catholics and those who are seeking to be Catholic should be inspired by the teachings of the Church. They are not just rules and regulations, nor a set of laws that somehow limit our freedom and potential. One cannot approach the faith as simply a set of rigid teachings and moral rules. It is so much more than that! *The teachings of Christ and the Church are the very answers to the deepest longings of the human heart!* They are not a “No” to this or a “No” to that, but rather a “Yes” to life and goodness and freedom. This is what Jesus himself was saying to us when he said “I came so that they might have life and have it more

abundantly.” (Jn 10:10) To open wide the doors to Christ is to open ourselves up to the fullness of life and what it means to be human!

It is also a presentation of the faith in light of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and the writings of Pope John Paul II. Vatican II and John Paul II do not present new teachings or doctrines, but instead they both present the Catholic faith in a *new and dynamic way* which answers the many facets and dimensions of the pressing questions that our modern society so often asks. They both present a powerful dialogue of faith that reaches out to the modern world and invites and enables us to truly open wide the doors of our hearts and minds without fear to the truths of Christ. It is my hope that this book will further this dialogue, the dialogue of love and truth which Christ desires to have with each one of us if only we open our hearts and minds to him!

This book was especially written in light of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA), which is the process established by the Church through which she brings in new members. It is so important for those who come to the Church and join her faithful to be well formed in the faith. RCIA presents a unique moment of evangelization, not only to those who are seeking to become Catholic, but also to their spouses, families, sponsors, and the parish community. It is often the new converts to Catholicism that remind all of us of the power and richness of the faith. They come to the Church seeking to know Christ and the fullness of the faith. It is the *serious responsibility* of the Church, and those to whom this ministry of evangelization and catechesis has been entrusted, to form the candidates and catechumens in the faith, so that they are able to embrace and live Catholicism to its fullness.

This book is given as a powerful tool in catechizing and evangelizing converts to Catholicism and forming them and encouraging them to truly open wide the doors to Christ and his Church. It will help those who are becoming Catholics learn the sources and roots of their faith, and also help them discover new ways of knowing and experiencing the Tradition of the Church, especially in the light of Vatican II and the dynamic papacy and teachings of Pope John Paul II. It is my sincere hope that this book will help them along the journey of *faith seeking understanding* that accompanies daily ongoing conversion to which we are all called.

I conclude with the unforgettable and encouraging words of St. Paul:

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:38-39)

Do not be afraid! Open wide the doors to Christ!