

TRANSMITTING THE FAITH

There's a sense these days that we are being issued an urgent call to become well-informed about what we believe and why we believe it so we can pass-on our Catholic faith. The Clarion Herald, the newspaper of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, LA, reports in its January 25, 2014 issue that Pope Francis in his weekly general audience on January 15, 2014 advised "Christians facing difficulties and discrimination, especially in the Middle East, can learn a valuable lesson from Japanese Christians who survived by clandestinely baptizing, praying and hiding during 250 years of harsh persecutions" that began in the 17th century. He was quoted as saying that every single priest was expelled from the country while thousands of Christians there were killed and those who were left went underground. When missionaries were allowed to return they found thousands of Christians ready to help the Church blossom again.

The Pope in a series of talks on the sacraments reminded us that it is through Baptism that "we become members of the body of Christ and the people of God". He said that just as parents pass the gift of life from generation to generation, the gift of grace is passed on with each person's rebirth through Baptism. Japanese Christians "survived with the grace of Baptism", which, because there were no priests, was conferred to every newborn by his/her baptized mother or father. "They maintained, even in secrecy, a strong spirit of community because Baptism made them become a single body in Christ; they were isolated and hidden, but they were always members of the people of God, of the Church." He stated further that every Christian has the duty to transmit the faith and are disciples "because we receive the faith and missionaries because we transmit the faith".

As we ponder the Pope's message, let's be clear about our understanding of its fuller meaning. It is taken for granted that once we bring another into the faith, into God's family through Baptism, it is important to transmit the church's teachings to them correctly and conscientiously. This requires taking steps to further our own knowledge of these teachings so we serve Jesus faithfully and bring His Light into the gloom and darkness that prevails.