

I'm not normally a great follower of political party conferences but what Ed Milliband said at Manchester a few weeks ago is worth recalling. Ed Milliband is, of course, an avowed atheist. But in his speech as Labour leader he claimed to be a man of faith. He believes in a kind of inner human spirit. He believes in equality and justice. He believes in the importance of community and he believes in this nation.

This fundamental sense of faith is a good thing and is something we all need to have, that fundamental conviction and determination to do the right thing and to make the world a better place.

And in inaugurating the Year of Faith Pope Benedict would want to honour Ed Milliband's sense of faith. But he would also want to lead him through the eye of the needle to faith, not just in humanity but to faith in God, Jesus and the Church.

*'What must I do to inherit eternal life?'* asks the rich young man. This is where a distinctly Christian faith has to begin. Faith in humanity is simply not enough. This Year of Faith is not just about making the world a better place, it is about eternity. *'What must I do to inherit eternal life?'* How we are saved from our sins and saved from death. This Year of Faith is about being in and with God for ever.

But is this actually what we want? Do we actually want to pass through that eye of the needle? This Year of Faith is a great opportunity for us to renew our faith. There's lots of literature at the back of the church to help us. In the *Doorway to Faith* booklet it reminds us that 'there is in our hearts, at the very centre of ourselves, a desire for God'. As we begin this special year it is that desire that we need to rediscover and rekindle.

And if we are really to want all this, if we are really to want life with God in all its abundance, then the response from Jesus is quite clear: Give up everything else and follow me.

And for us Catholic Christians following Jesus means following the Church. It's not just in some mythological figure from the past in whom we place our faith. We place our faith in the living Lord, alive and active in His Body, the Church.

This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church.  
We are proud to profess it, in Christ Jesus Our Lord. Amen