

Theological Reflection

“Lord, Increase My Faith”

Faith is a gift. It is a theological virtue. We all know that, but how can it increase and what is faith exactly? There are a myriad of examples of faith in action but where can I find what the Church teaches about faith?

So like all good Catholics we go to the Universal Catechism to research the topic as a jumping off point. Most of you have had the Cenacle course on the Catechism and therefore already appreciate the beauty of the language in which it is framed. Every sentence is packed with meaning and should be meditated on, and the section on faith is no exception. I quote from number 158: “Faith seeks understanding: ‘it is intrinsic to faith that a believer desires to know better the One in whom he has put his faith and to understand better what He has revealed; a more penetrating knowledge will in turn call forth a greater faith, increasingly set afire by love.’ The grace of faith opens ‘the eyes of your hearts’ to a lively understanding of the contents of Revelation: that is, of the totality of God’s plan and the mysteries of faith of their connection with each other and with Christ, the center of the revealed mystery.”

Faith believes first and then seeks understanding, as St. Anselm told us, to know why and how. It is the Holy Spirit that helps us to plumb the very mystery of who God is. Faith leads us deeper into the mystery and the more we believe, the more is revealed. The heart of God is a blazing furnace of love. When we get to know him more, we too become fire. In the light of this fire we see and understand more and more of what is revealed by God through Scripture and through the teachings of the Church. This is what faith does. As we understand more of the faith, the teachings of the Church, we love God more as we fathom the divine mysteries of life, grace and redemption. Our faith increases as our knowledge of God deepens. With each act of faith, our supernatural virtue of faith grows stronger.

We all have come a long way since the early days of our religious training when some of us learned by heart the Baltimore Catechism and came to believe with our minds the words we memorized, i.e., “Who made us?”...God made us; “Who is God?”...God is the Supreme Being, infinitely perfect, who made all things and keeps them in existence; “Why did God make us?”...God made us to show forth His goodness and to share with us His everlasting happiness in heaven. It was a gift from God that helped us to believe these truths of the Church. Our will was informed by God’s grace so that we could understand and profess all that we learned then and now. How little did we understand all of this when we were young. I still remember my copy of the Baltimore Catechism and how I cherished it,

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since it was my first book. How proud we all were in being able to recite the answers, answers which to this day have stayed with us in our memory and are embedded in our souls as a lifeline at times during the difficult days. I can still remember my mother quizzing me on my catechism homework, since we were public school students. And deep beneath those memories and those recitations lies the gift of faith.

Those simple catechism questions with their seemingly simple answers have lead all of us on a journey, a journey into the heart of God. We grasp those answers with a profound understanding informed by our intellect and with the help of the Holy Spirit. How proud our mothers are of us today because we are living our faith, having been tested in our faith, and we practice it from the rising of the sun (morning prayer) to its setting (evening prayer).

As we have grown our questions become somewhat more sophisticated as we struggle with the existential questions of the meaning of life, the value of a human being, and the dignity of personhood. No matter how erudite the questions, it all goes back to “Who is God,” and “Why did God make us?” It all goes back to God made the entire universe to show forth his goodness and we know that he does everything perfectly. If we believe this we have faith, trust, and belief in the God who made us and the universe. Therefore we can return the favor by always doing all that we do for God, since He has done all for us. To do all for the glory of God (with a nod to St. Ignatius) sums up nicely how we are to conduct ourselves in this world made out of love for us. We are part of this infinite glory of God that he has created! To believe this previous sentence proves that we possess the gift of faith.

Remember that God does not need us for his glory and we add nothing to his glory. We are made for his own glory. As Father Leo Trese sums up: “It is God’s goodness that caused him to share his happiness with us, and it is God’s sharing his happiness with us that shows forth his goodness.” As we go through our busy and crowded days, let us recall that we are made by God and for God, that he is interested in us and that we truly are glorious beings made out of love. How pleased God is with us when we exercise our gift of faith and believe in Him and His love for us. How blessed are we when we put our faith in His Church and its teachings. Years ago, when my sister Cynthia was studying to be a School Sister of Notre Dame, I would visit her at the Motherhouse and would also speak with Sister Sybilla, Cynthia’s old eighth grade teacher. Sybilla always ended our conversations with the injunction, “Keep the Faith.” Let all of us stay close to the Church,

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pray for it and hold onto the faith that we received as children. “Keep the Faith” whatever that might mean for each of us.

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