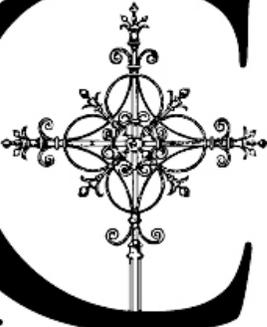


RCIA



Christian Formation Process

Like a Mustard Seed: The Stirrings of Faith

A journalist famously asked Saint Pope John Paul II, “When all is said and done, what is the use of believing? Does faith offer something more? Isn’t it possible to live an honest upright life without bothering to take the Gospel seriously?”

The answer he gives comes from the Church’s Declaration on Religious Freedom, “All human beings are bound to search for the truth, especially with regard to God and His Church, and as they come to know it they are bound to adhere to the truth and pay homage to it.” Thus one can say the “essential usefulness of faith consists in the fact that, through faith, man achieves the good of his rational nature.”

But what how do we start?

Faith like many things grows over time. As you begin to explore the teachings of the Church, your faith will grow. But faith even in small amounts can be a powerful thing.

John 17:14-20

¹⁴ And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and kneeling before him said, ¹⁵ “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly; for often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. ¹⁶ And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him.” ¹⁷ And Jesus answered, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me.” ¹⁸ And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly. ¹⁹ Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” ²⁰ He said to them, “Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith as a

grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from hence to yonder place,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you."^[c]

Questions for thought:

As you take this journey of faith it can be helpful to keep a journal of your thoughts and feelings. As a starting exercise, consider starting a journal and answer the following questions:

1. What are you looking for in life? What are your goals and ideals? How is your life a journey toward God?
2. As a seeker, how do you look for truth? What have you found in your search thus far?
3. How does the Church help you in your search for God? How does your family affect your faith?

But what is faith?

Hebrews 11-12:2

The Meaning of Faith

11 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.² For by it the men of old received divine approval.³ By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things, which do not appear.

The Examples of Abel, Enoch, and Noah

⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous, God bearing witness by accepting his gifts; he died, but through his faith he is still speaking.⁵ By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was attested as having pleased God.⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.^[a]⁷ By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, took heed and constructed an ark for the saving of his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith.

The Faith of Abraham

⁸ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place, which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go.⁹ By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in

tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he looked forward to the city, which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. ¹¹ By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

¹³ These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your descendants be named." ¹⁹ He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence he did receive him back, and this was a symbol. ²⁰ By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. ²¹ By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. ²² By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his burial.^[b]

The Faith of Moses

²³ By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. ²⁴ By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵ choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶ He considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward. ²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king; for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. ²⁸ By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the first-born might not touch them.

The Faith of Other Israelite Heroes

²⁹ By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land; but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. ³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. ³¹ By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given friendly welcome to the spies.

³² And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions,³⁴ quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.³⁵ Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release that they might rise again to a better life.³⁶ Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment.³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two,^[c] they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated—³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy—wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

³⁹ And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised,⁴⁰ since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

The Example of Jesus

12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,^[a]² looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

According to the Catechism, Faith can be described as:

- Faith is a gift from God. He not only enters a relationship with us but also gives us the grace or help to respond in faith.
- In faith we surrender our whole being to God who has revealed himself to us. This involves the assent of the intellect and will to the Revelation that God has made in words and deeds.
- By faith, we enter a relationship of trust in God as well as belief in the message of truth that he has revealed.
- Faith is a free, conscious, human act. Faith is a way of knowing just as reason is, though it is different from reason. Faith involves the whole of the human being. Aided by the Holy Spirit we exercise faith in a manner that corresponds to our human dignity.
- Faith is a supremely personal act: “I believe.” It is also communal, occurring within the life and worship of the Church. In the assembly of believers at Mass, as we join together in the Profession of Faith (or Creed), we experience ourselves as the Body of Christ.

- By faith we believe with conviction in all that is contained in the Word of God, written or handed down, which the Church proposes for belief as divinely revealed.
- Faith is necessary for salvation. “Believing in Jesus Christ and the One who sent him for our salvation is necessary for obtaining that salvation.” (CCC, no 161)

Questions for thought:

1. Who are the outstanding models of faith that inspire you to a deeper faith and practice?
2. How is your faith bringing you closer to God and to a deeper understanding of his message?
3. In what way do you find it difficult to be open about your faith in public situations?
4. How have you been able to apply your faith to the decisions that you make such as family issues, community development, and political decisions?

Final Thought for Mediation:

Where did I find you, that I came to know you? You were not within my memory before I learned of you. Where, then, did I find you before I came to know you, if not within yourself, far above me? . . . Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! . . . Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would not have been at all. [O eternal truth, true love and beloved eternity. You are my God. To you I sigh day and night.] . . . You were with me but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would not have been at all. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you; now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burn for your peace. —St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, bk. 10, chap. 26, 27.37

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (CCC no. 146)

Closing Prayer:

Psalm 42

^[a]As a deer longs
for flowing streams,
so longs my soul
for thee, O God.

²My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.

When shall I come and behold
the face of God?

³My tears have been my food
day and night,
while men say to me continually,

“Where is your God?”

⁴ These things I remember,
as I pour out my soul:
how I went with the throng,
and led them in procession to the house of God,
with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving,
a multitude keeping festival.

⁵ Why are you cast down, O my soul
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help ⁶ and my God.