

FAITH AND BELIEF - GOD IS WITH US

Look up faith on Google and you will find over seven hundred listings and definitions, each accompanied by pages of explanations. What would seem to be a very simple word is anything but. Basically faith is based on trust and reliability of another person. If they answer your question you believe them. That is fine for human relations. What about faith in God? There it gets a bit more complex for depending where a person may be coming from and the books they use the answer will vary considerably. Perhaps for most people, their faith can be traced back to their earliest childhood and just how they were raised. Was God a part of their earlier years or not. If he was, than faith in God becomes a reality in their lives. But then as one grows older, all sorts of other experiences begin to enter into one's life and through the teen years into adulthood, many experiences will affect their way of thinking. But once they reach the age of twenty, then the judgment center in their brain clicks in and from that point on, they have the tools to make rational judgments as to what their faith really is and what it means to them. For many a person, there will be years of uncertainty. It is during this period that the example of others has a definite influence on them, whether they realize it or not, and their faith will grow or diminish, perhaps change one way or another and finally will find its niche in their lives

This is an oversimplification of the whole process of faith in one's life, but in general it does give some idea of what happens with many persons. From the Catholic point of view one should be very aware of how their practice of their faith does have an influence on others but one should never expect to actually see this happen. From my experience as pastor of a ski area for twenty seven years, the fact that so many visitors came to church while they were on vacation did have a profound effect on not only other vacationers but on the local people as well. God was quietly at work through the example of so many. The effect all this had on the children is very far reaching, teaching them through example that God is important in their lives all the time, not just when they are home and in getting them to see his hand in their lives all the time, not just in church!

In the first reading for this Sunday taken from the prophet Habakkuk (not a very well known prophet) we hear his message that faith is basically for the things of day-to-day life which are difficult to handle, things like violence and misery, discord and ruin. At some time in one's life everything seems to fall apart or the world around one seems to be self-destructing. Given the economic melt-down in our country and in all of the world today, one can see how depressed one can get wondering even if there really is a God who cares! This does test one's faith. But the only real answer then is not to look for God elsewhere but rather to turn to God and ask him what is happening and why, and not to be afraid to argue with him! This by itself will and should prove to one that they really do have faith and are blessed with the knowledge that God is a close enough friend that they truly can argue and fight with him. One would do this with their very best friend here on earth knowing that it would not hurt the friendship. That is the nature of true friendship, and in fact can and often does make the friendship even closer. Strange as it may sound, out of this comes a stronger faith and a stronger trust in God. And if one then reflects that Jesus, who was the Son of God, went through suffering and crucifixion to save everyone then one can begin to see how even God may have had his doubts. Remember the words of Christ on the cross: "My God, My God! Why have you abandoned me?" Yes, Jesus Christ our savior knows very well just how

so many feel at times. But one cannot stop there which would be tragic, stopping and admitting defeat! No. Christ went on to the resurrection, gaining an entirely new life, a life he has promised all his followers will be theirs; just stick it out! Stay with him! Never give up hope!

Again listen to Habakkuk: "If it delays, wait for it. It will surely come, and not too late." If one can remember, after the end of the Second World War there was a general fear of a nuclear wipe-out. People built bomb shelters! The country built silos for defense and/or retaliation. Nothing ever really happened and then suddenly the wall came tumbling down. Can anyone disprove that just maybe God did have a hand in it all? Again, we must all constantly remind ourselves that God has never once given up on his world, his creation, his universe. He has a plan and it is working out, very messy at times due to the machinations of many a human. Sometime in the future, (don't hold your breath) the final day will come and then God's promise of a new life, a full life, a glorified life will be totally fulfilled for each and every one of us.

In the Second Reading we hear St. Paul encouraging his young helper, Timothy, to remember the gift he was given when he was first baptized by Paul. He reminds him that the Holy Spirit was poured out upon him. Paul urges him to stir up that flame of love, to realize that he is never alone but that the Holy Spirit, God himself, is always with him. Paul wants him to once again see and grasp the vision, that vision to help him put aside boredom, exhaustion, even despair. The vision of what the church will be is coming. It is important and he must be determined to wait for it. Paul himself never once lost sight of what God wanted for his Church, and he used every ounce of his strength to help make it happen. Little did he realize that two thousand years later it would be alive and functioning. We now today live in this Church, but even now it is not quite complete as Christ was hoping for. Every age has had its problems and struggled to correct them, only to find that new ones were always present to fill the void.

One wonders just how all this can happen, year after year, decade after decade, century after century. But this is not really a mystery for it is the result of original sin. God has chosen to work through all this mess calling on all his true believers to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem. And in the Gospel for this Sunday he is spurring on his Apostles to keep the faith. For faith itself is a powerful tool in conquering evil, all evil. But one must realize this and how important it is to live that faith, even though there will be many times when it will seem impossible. But then it is important to renew our trust in our Lord. Our faith is not just a number of precepts; it is a living reality with Christ himself very much a part of it. Our faith depends on a person, Christ himself, God made man. He is still very much with each of us individually. Pray you see his hand in your life. It is real! It is there! It will always hold you up.

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