I have Webster’s in front of me on the page of “myth, mystics, and mystery.” I continue to be drawn to their similar roots: Greek mythos, mysterion, mystos, mystikos; Latin mysterium, ministerium. The concepts are shrouded and encased in, basically, things we don’t really understand with the five senses; things we are unable to grasp, control, or manage in our world.

Many of the more “profound” teachings of Jesus that are recorded are teachings that seem to be “unfounded” on the logic of his times, of his world, teachings that call us to “something other” than what the people then—or now—were (or are) aware of. Jesus was calling us to something other than what was/is familiar. Jesus was calling us to believe in the message behind the words and concepts, calling us to tread a path unfamiliar, to have something called FAITH. He is quoted as telling the apostles and those who were with them gathered together, to receive the Holy Spirit, to await the Paraclete he would send. The message in the gospels has Jesus saying, “Go out to the world spreading the Good News, baptizing, healing…doing the things they saw Jesus do. This is not to say that some would not die as witness to their faith in Jesus, in Justice, in the Power of God, but that Jesus’ death was the point at which the power of oppression on the people was broken and we had the power, the strength, the faith to live lives different from what we had been taught, had been “programmed” to expect.

While evangelizing is one of the first steps, it is not the only step. Paul is rightfully considered the most prolific of the evangelists as exemplified in his writings and in the number of places where he established “belief centers” around the Middle East of his day. But there is evidence that the other apostles were just as active in spreading what Jesus did on earth, but more along the lines of founding and living in base communities. My take is that you can teach and philosophize about Jesus’ message, but you also have to actually experience living it. I sense that others might describe that as putting belief into action.

Action speaks louder than words. There is no doubt of that statement in my mind. Ministries in the Church are faith in action, no doubt about it. The fourteen spiritual and corporeal works of mercy are a perfect example of that. But there are many people who do the actions without having faith; and also the flip side of that thought works: doing the actions can and does lead people to faith. But the concept doesn’t hold if you turn it around: e.g. “people of faith have to do those actions because the life and grace of God demand that the actions be done.” Instead, people do the actions because it helps grow their faith.

And so we come to a new realization. While everyone is called to do or be everything, in point of fact, different people have different gifts for the purpose of “building up the body” (according to St. Paul) and need to concentrate in those specific areas.

Prayer. Praying.

How are we taught to pray?

I was taught to pray on my knees next to my bed with my mother next to me. Hands folded, head bowed, eyes closed, I recited the words of prayers with her: Angel of God, Glory Be, Hail Mary, Our Father. Eventually the Apostle’s Creed and the rosary devotion, and prayers related to centuries old devotions with flowery language. Mass was in Latin, which we glibly rattled off when prompted.

I first encountered meditation in seminary high school, where we marched into chapel in platoon (by class), knelt in silence for fifteen minutes and used some crutch (My Daily Bread was mine) to think about. We needed those booklets to hold our attention, because the football field was outside the window. Then the bell rang, and off to the next class.

The most important examples of a prayer life were my parents. With mom turned into a quadriplegic from polio, my parents doubled down on prayer, because it was their closest hope for help. A routine factory job, five children, a house payment, and huge medical bills did not leave much money for daily living. Their commitment to Catholic schooling for us was an incredible sacrifice. My mom shared one story where the family sat down to dinner and we said grace. There was no food in the house. The phone rang, Dad answered it. It was a customer (Dad fixed tv’s in the basement after work as a second job so he could be home) able to pay his bill. An hour later, dad brought in food.

Mom and Dad used the sacraments as tools to survive. Their faith honored their vows and commitments, and God literally took care of them. That is Faith, that is the power of prayer.

We do not live in Nazareth two thousand years ago. We do not live in the times of Feudal governments of Europe. We do not live in times of the Reformation. We do not even live in the times of the ending of Nazi rule in Europe. We have telescopes that not only tell us that the earth goes around the sun, but that can parse out nebulae light years away. We now have moved forward to eliminate the stigma of leprosy. We are now able to communicate with electronics. We have so many “THINGS” that didn’t exist, weren’t understood when the history of our prayer devotions and styles were being encouraged. We do not have a connection in our lives for the need for those devotions, or the styles.

Science and technology have not negated our need for God in any way. Instead, science and technology is revealing the works of God, the wonders of God in new ways. I asked myself, how do miracles happen? Does God bypass the laws of physics and perform wonders at God’s whim? I suppose so. But, instead, what if God knowing how physics works in its totality makes physics work more reasonably?

The first miracle recorded in Mark’s gospel (i.e. the first gospel) tells about Jesus getting a call for help. He is walking down the street to answer the call when he stops and calls, “WHO TOUCHED ME?” Already you know the outcome, but bear with me. Is there anything in the time of Jesus which would relate to an electric shock? Jesus felt power go out of him. The woman with the hemorrhage felt power go into her. Is it a miracle? Damn straight! And yet today we are working with electron beams to fight cancer, with high frequency vibration to control bleeding, light waves as scalpels.

Science has told us that our bodies are electron power houses. The sci-fi movie series “The Matrix” exemplifies it. Our bodies are established in a way that energy flows out from one hand into the other just like the pole contacts of a battery. We are batteries with polar charge. The joke when we were in college, “many hands make light work,” takes on a whole new perception.

Scientific studies of meditating people—from cloistered nuns to Hindu monks to native indigenous people—demonstrate the ability to do “miracles” which are outside of normal behavior, because they focus intent. Jesus, sitting on the hillside is being open to God’s intent because he chooses it. This type of meditating, of being open to the suggestion of God’s power is available to those who take the time to intend it in pure submission to God’s will. This is what the Apostles asked when they said, “Lord, teach us to pray.” This is what Jesus alludes to in Mk 9:28-29. This is what is “plugged in” to the Apostles when they see tongues of fire settling down on them.

This is what I as a believer am called to partake in, to encourage people to pray and take responsibility in their actions and lives for it. This is not a new paradigm, but a clarification of the old paradigm.

In light of Laudato Si, the world will not survive unless we enter this new hope.