

Faith?

Numerous times throughout the Gospels our Lord commends someone's faith – especially at healings. A few examples would be the centurion, the people who lowered the man through the roof on a stretcher, and the Gentile woman (from the region of Tyre & Sidon) whose daughter was possessed. It is as if our Lord is saying (and repeatedly so) that in order for Him to do anything for us, in order for Him to interact with us, this thing called faith is an absolute, non-negotiable necessity. This is reinforced when our Lord also tries to correct someone's weakness in faith – Peter when he sunk while walking on water, or the man who wished to have his son delivered from a demon, or when Jesus was unable – not unwilling but *unable* – to perform many signs (miracles) in Nazareth because of their lack of faith.

Our Lord, then, not only brings out the necessity of faith but He does so...*with emphasis*. The Gospels practically blow a horn saying: Faith, Faith, Faith. Faith is necessary, not optional. For those involved in that God-forsaken discipline known as mathematics (!), they would say: faith is necessary but not sufficient. It is not the highest of virtues (charity is) but we cannot have charity (= love of God) without faith. So faith is not enough, but it is absolutely and irrevocably necessary. To say it is important, understates the need for it. Given that, I should make sure I really have it, that it is not something I neglect or presume, which means I need to start with the question of: what is faith?

Let us begin by noting that the word 'faith' is used in different ways. For example, I might speak of "the faith" or the Catholic faith. In these cases, the word "faith" is being used to refer to what's called the Deposit of the Faith – which is everything in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, all that God has revealed and given to His Church. What I want to speak of here, though, is the *virtue* of faith. There is a direct connection between the virtue of faith and the Deposit of the Faith – hence the multiple usages of the word – but, nonetheless, I am speaking here specifically of the virtue of faith. So what is the *virtue* of faith – I need to know this otherwise how can I know if I need to strengthen it or work on it or even how to make an act of faith?

To understand the virtue of faith, it is helpful to start with man's natural capacities – what he can and cannot do and in particular what he can and cannot know (naturally). Suppose the question came up as to whether or not it's going to rain tomorrow. Some might say yes, I think it's going to, some might say no, I don't think so. Notice that neither really knows for sure; in both cases it's just an opinion. But if tomorrow comes and there's water falling out of the sky, then you know with certainty that it has rained. This simple little exercise tells us something important about ourselves – we cannot, with just our own natural capacities, know anything with certitude unless we can see it immediately and directly. You didn't know, *with certitude*, whether or not it was going to rain tomorrow until tomorrow got here and you could see immediately and directly.

Now this presents us with a problem. Man is not capable of knowing anything with absolute certainty unless he can see it immediately and directly. Man cannot see God immediately and directly. Even if, like Aristotle, we were able (based on natural observation) to reason our way to the conclusion that there must be some sort of 'God' and there can be only one, we would have no idea what He is like. We could not possibly know that He is 3 persons, one God or if God is love. Suppose a consecrated and unconsecrated host were laid side by side, you would not know which is which because you cannot see Jesus directly in the consecrated host. *And yet...* I will say that I am *more* certain that a validly consecrated host is the person of Jesus than I am that the sun will rise in the east tomorrow. I am *absolutely* certain of it. But how can this be since, by his own nature, man is completely incapable of having certainty – deep down, unshakable certainty – about anything that he cannot directly and immediately see. We have a conundrum. How can it be resolved? Can it be resolved? Hmmm... this is going to take some thinking, it's going to do some serious violence to my lazy streak. Doggone it anyway. Well let's see...I cannot, by my own *natural* powers, know anything with certitude that I cannot see immediately and directly, and yet I have absolute certitude about things I cannot immediately and directly see. It's as if I need something like a super-power to do that – I need something added to my natural powers to be able to do that – that is to say: something super-natural.

Ahhh now wait a minute, wait just one confounded minute, maybe that's it. Suppose someone actually gives me a super-power, or a super-natural power, a power beyond my natural capacities, to know – to be absolutely

certain about, down to my very core – things that cannot be immediately and directly seen? That has to be the case, there is no other way. Now man is not capable of giving this to himself so someone greater than himself would have to give it to him – perhaps someone he cannot see but yet who loves him and wishes to be in union with him. And, ladies and gentlemen, this is in fact what faith is. Faith is “something” – an intangible something, a grace – that God gives to man to make him *capable* of knowing with absolute certainty that which cannot be immediately and directly seen. Faith, then, is that which is added to a person that *enables* them to know with certitude those things of God that cannot be immediately and directly seen. It is a supernatural gift that enables us to know with certainty supernatural things – not natural things like will it rain later.

Now that we know the most basic effect of faith, let us consider it a little further. The virtue of faith, along with all of the virtues, are infused into a person at baptism. But you probably know someone who has been baptized and yet has no belief in God or is, at the very least, pretty casual about it. How can this be? It is because the virtue of faith makes man *capable* of knowing with certitude the things of God but it does not *force* him to know (or believe or accept). God does not force Himself on anyone since this would be contrary to His nature, contrary to the nature of love, which has to be freely offered, freely received, and freely reciprocated. The virtues are infused at baptism, but only in “seed-form.” What this means is that just like any seed, they have to sprout and grow to become what they are meant to be. That is to say that the virtues have to be exercised, which means a person has to *choose* to believe. An act of faith (the virtue of faith being exercised) involves use of both a person’s intellect and free-will.

Is an act of faith (exercising the virtue of faith) just a blind choice? This would imply that the intellect is not involved, which is impossible. Although faith enables us to have knowledge that is beyond what we could know with simple human reason (faith goes beyond reason), at the same time faith is not contrary to reason – it is reasonable to believe. One of the most direct ways to see this is by reckoning with the person of Jesus. That a man named Jesus from Nazareth existed at the time of our Lord is confirmed by even secular (non-religious) historical sources. There are two irrefutable historical facts about this man which tell us 1) there is a God, and 2) He’s it. The first is the prophecies. Hundreds, even 1000’s, of years before Jesus was even born there were a multitude of prophecies that were made about His life – things He would do or things that would happen or things that would happen to Him, all of which our Lord fulfilled. Two examples are at the crucifixion: there was a prophecy that said: not a bone of his body will be broken; it was Roman practice to break the legs of anyone crucified in order to speed up their death; both criminals on the side of our Lord had their legs broken, our Lord did not. That alone is unlikely, much less to be predicted centuries before His birth. Another prophecy was that: they will cast lots for his garments; and what do we see at the foot of the cross? The soldiers casting lots for His garments. There is a multitude of these predictions about the Messiah, made (and recorded) centuries before His birth, and Jesus fulfilled them all. That required something beyond human power. The second aspect of Jesus’ life that tells us there is a God and He’s it, are His great manifestations of power, the miracles He performed, which are attested to not only by His friends but even His enemies – maybe especially His enemies; this is why they sought to kill Him. We look at these 2 things about Jesus – the prophecies He fulfilled and His great manifestations of power – and any reasonable person has to say these are well beyond human capability; it is not only reasonable to believe, it’s unreasonable not to. Teach this to your young people, who are constantly bombarded with mindless contradictions to the reasonableness of faith.

But let us come now to the heart of the matter. Is real faith, a living faith, just a vague belief in the existence of God, as so many seem to think today? Even Satan knows that God exists. Real faith is a deep conviction, so much so that it has an impact on how who and what I am, the way that I am. It infiltrates, guards, guides, and directs every aspect of my life. This real faith is grown with daily choices to believe – choices made especially in difficult times and times of temptation....oh, does it really matter if I pray? That is a temptation against faith and a time to make an act of faith. In times of trial and tribulation, or great loss, or just plain and simply when things aren’t going the way I want, people will often blame God (lack of trust/faith in His Providence) or even give up belief altogether. There are countless opportunities for us to make acts of faith, which are also acts of humility. We can’t afford to pass them by. God bless you, Fr Kuhn.