

Handout on the Virtue of Faith

*** Read and Meditate Upon Hebrews 11

A. Definition

- a. “Both a gift of God and a human act by which the believer gives personal adherence to God who invites his response, and freely assents to the whole truth that God has revealed. It is this revelation of God which the Church proposes for our belief, and which we profess in the Creed, celebrate in the sacraments, live by right conduct that fulfills the twofold commandment of charity (as specified in the Ten Commandments), and respond to in our prayer of faith. Faith is both a theological virtue given by God as grace, and an obligation which flows from the first commandment of God” (CCC).
- b. “virtue infused by God in the intellect by which we firmly assent to divinely revealed truths on the authority of God who reveals them” (Royo, 364).
- c. Objective faith = what is believed
- d. Subjective faith = the infused virtue

B. Sins against faith

- a. infidelity or paganism – a universal unbelief
- b. heresy – disbelief or denial of a particular truth
- c. apostasy – complete abandonment of the Christian faith
- d. blasphemy
- e. blindness of heart – willful ignorance of supernatural realities
- f. dullness of spiritual sense – as opposed to sharp (myopic, shortsightedness)

C. Increase in Faith

- a. Faith can increase objectively (in the extension to numbers of revealed truths) and subjectively (in the purity and intensity of the act of faith)
- b. Helps to increase in faith:
 1. be convinced of the gratuitous nature of faith
 2. reject whatever is a danger to faith
 - i. use the indirect attack in dealing with temptations against the faith
 - ii. use prudence in reading material
 - iii. avoid intellectual pride
 3. exercise faith through regular adoration of the Blessed Sacrament
 4. study Catholic doctrine
 5. make frequent acts of faith
 6. pray daily the Creed and use ejaculatory prayers such as “I believe, Lord; help by disbelief!”
 7. practice of beholding God in faith without selfish motives
 - i. believing firmly despite aridity and lack of consolation
 8. make every effort to evaluate all things in accord with the teachings of the faith
 9. Walk in faith during times of suffering and adversity
 10. Study the lives of the martyrs and saints and imitate their faith

Texts for Prayer and Meditation on Faith and the New Evangelization

- D. "Increase our faith!" (Lk 17:5)
- E. "When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Lk 18:8).
- F. "I believe, help my unbelief!" (Mk 9:24).
- G. "Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mk 11:22-24).
- H. On various occasions, the Lord Jesus admonishes "the Twelve" for their lack of faith. To the question of why they were unable to cast out a demon, the Master responds: "Because of your little faith" (Δια την ὀλιγοπιστίαν ὑμῶν) (Mt 17:20).
- I. On the Sea of Tiberias, before calming the storm, Jesus reproves his disciples: "Why are you afraid, O men of little faith?" (ὀλιγόπιστοι) (Mt 8:26). They were to entrust themselves to God and to Providence, and not worry about material things. "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith?" (Mt 6:30; cf. Lk 12:28).
- J. A similar situation takes place before the multiplication of the loaves. Faced with the realization that the disciples had forgotten to take bread in crossing to the other side of the lake, the Lord Jesus says: "O men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered?" (Mt 16:8-9) (*Instrumentum Laboris*, Preface).
- K. "Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water" (Mt 14:28). At first, St. Peter walks towards Jesus on the water without any difficulty. "But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'O man of little faith, why did you doubt?'" (Mt 14:30-31). By allowing themselves to be animated by the Holy Spirit, Christians will then be more attuned to their brothers and sisters who, despite being baptized, have drifted from the Church and Christian practice. The new evangelization is primarily directed to these people so that they can rediscover the beauty of their Christian faith and the joy of a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus in the Church and the community of the faithful (*Instrumentum Laboris*, Preface).
- L. "We cannot accept that salt should become tasteless or the light be kept hidden (cf. Mt 5:13-16). The people of today can still experience the need to go to the well, like the Samaritan woman, in order to hear Jesus, who invites us to believe in him and to draw upon the source of living water welling up within him (cf. Jn 4:14). We must rediscover a taste for feeding ourselves on the word of God, faithfully handed down by the Church, and on the bread of life, offered as sustenance for his disciples (cf. Jn 6:51). Indeed, the teaching of Jesus still resounds in our day with the same power: "Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life" (Jn 6:27). The question posed by his listeners is the same that we ask today: "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" (Jn 6:28). We know Jesus' reply: "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent" (Jn 6:29). Belief in Jesus Christ, then, is the way to arrive definitively at salvation" (*Porta Fidei*, 3).
- M. "The words of Saint Peter shed one final ray of light on faith: "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet 1:6-9). The life of Christians knows the experience of joy as well as the experience of suffering. How many of the saints have lived in solitude! How many believers, even in our own day, are tested by God's silence when they would rather hear his consoling voice! The trials of life, while helping us to understand the mystery of the Cross and to participate in the sufferings of Christ (cf. Col 1:24), are a prelude to the joy and hope to which faith leads: "when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor 12:10). We believe with firm certitude that the Lord Jesus has conquered evil and death. With this sure confidence we entrust ourselves to him: he, present in our midst, overcomes the power of the evil one (cf. Lk 11:20); and the Church, the visible community of his mercy, abides in him as a sign of definitive reconciliation with the Father" (*Porta Fidei*, 15).

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