

Homily on Wednesday, 23 October 2024, Trinity XX.

Faith, oftentimes, can be abysmally frustrating and unbelievably exciting. The reason for this is that it is cosmic. Take, for example, the times you prayed for a special purpose and received an answer - a course to thank God from the bottom of your heart.

But what about the moments when it seemed God was deaf or pretending not to hear you? Such, sometimes, leads us to feelings of anger and annoyance. To some, it can come in the form of betrayal when we have been loyal to the gospel as we understand it.

One of the Doctors of the Church, St. Augustine, left us with this profound thought about faith and how it ought to be received by us. "Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe."

I have often wondered if Augustine received the inspiration for this quote, having perused the Gospel of John as we read a while ago. But it isn't just an idea per se. On one hand, 'faith' is a belief and trust in and loyalty to God; on the other hand, it is a firm belief in something for which there is no proof. Faith, non-believers would say, is inconsistent within itself, but it often requires firm conviction in something, either in God or in your ability as a person to deliver on a task. I know for sure because I often make the wrong toast for Pusey's Breakfast.

"Faith", as Martin Luther King would argue, is "taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase."

This nobleman, a royal official, has heard that Jesus has just entered from Judea to Galilee; he took what is often regarded as a leap of faith to go and beseech him to come to heal his son. It is quite clear, at least to me, that from the 53rd verse, before Jesus came to Galilee, he and his household are not believers. What this does is refer us to the wisdom I referenced earlier, from St. Augustine, 'Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.'

Speaking about faith in the "Year of Faith" from 2012 to 2013 — Pope Benedict said: "Faith is not a mere intellectual assent of the human person to specific truths about God; it is an act with which I entrust myself freely to a God who is Father and who loves me; it is adherence to a 'You' who gives me hope and trust." Isn't this exactly what this nobleman did? He made his way back, and halfway, he met his servants and learned that his son was alive and well and probably enjoying leftover wine. He sincerely believed the word Jesus had spoken to him. Faith is indeed meeting God.

Pope Benedict continued, "Having faith, then, is meeting this 'You,' God, who supports me and grants me the promise of an indestructible love that not only aspires to eternity but gives it; it means entrusting myself to God with the attitude of a child, who knows well that all his difficulties, all his problems are understood in the 'you' of his mother." What a deep-seated thoughts!

Trusting and resigning our faith in God can be frustrating to many, but Jesus' word can sustain us on our journey by discovering a new life. Indeed, Liturgy and its richness and reverence for the one whose mercy we yearn for draws people close to the Church but what I find particularly fascinating is the fact that they approach this mystic, this faith, to understand it and to understand why we do what we do, why we believe is something not so visible to an outsider. And when they come in, they encounter the word. From that moment, Liturgy

picks up the broken pieces again by way of transformation. And just like the centurion, he speaks the word only and builds up their faith.

Friends, there are times when our faith in Christ is challenged. There have been times in history when Christians are mocked and ridiculed. It is still happening and will continue to linger. When the very moral fabric of society is ridiculed, our faith is challenged. When the faith of the Apostles and our Fathers is debated and voted on, just be aware that your faith is being challenged. When it seems all is lost and that no one is coming to your rescue; your faith is being challenged. When you struggle with sin and don't know how to confront it; your faith is being challenged.

It is worth knowing that the usual suspect, the devil, in his cleverness, is very much invested in the business of challenging our faith in God. He does this by way of reason, our human capacity to postulate and arrive at conclusions. For St. John Chrysostom, reason and faith are both gifts from God. Reason cannot even hope to complement the transcendent nature of faith. “Faith, according to John Chrysostom, “needs a generous and vigorous soul; and one rising above all things of sense; and passing beyond the weakness of human reasonings. For it is not possible to become a believer, other than by raising one's self above the common customs [of the world].

Dear friends, faith requires obedience and not curiosity, and when God commands, one ought to be obedient, not curious.

Trusting, obedience and belief in the One who is the author and finisher of our faith, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen