



Topic 3: Supernatural Faith

CCC, 142-197

Further Reading: St Josemaria Escriva,
“Life of Faith,” in *Friends of God* .

I Believe – We Believe

- ✓ Man's Capacity for God
- ✓ God Comes to Meet Man
 - ✓ The Revelation of God
 - ✓ The Transmission of Divine Revelation
 - ✓ Sacred Scripture
- Man's Response to God
 - I Believe
 - What is Faith?
 - Who do I Believe?
 - The Characteristics of Faith
 - We Believe
 - The Ecclesial Dimension of Faith

Faith & Reason



Reason

- A relationship with the truth founded on the human ability to think.
- Limited by our finitude (we are mortal and finite beings).
- Proper thinking, questioning and arguing; looking for proper ways of communicating the truth.

Faith

- Having knowledge we believe to be true even if we cannot come to it by ourselves.
- We use faith at a human level (trust others).
- Faith can also be a relationship with the truth that surpasses the human ability to think or know.
- Faith surpasses reason in relation to Divine Revelation.

Though faith is above reason, there can never be any real discrepancy between faith and reason.

Since the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith has bestowed the light of reason on the human mind, God cannot deny himself, nor can truth ever contradict truth.

Definition of faith

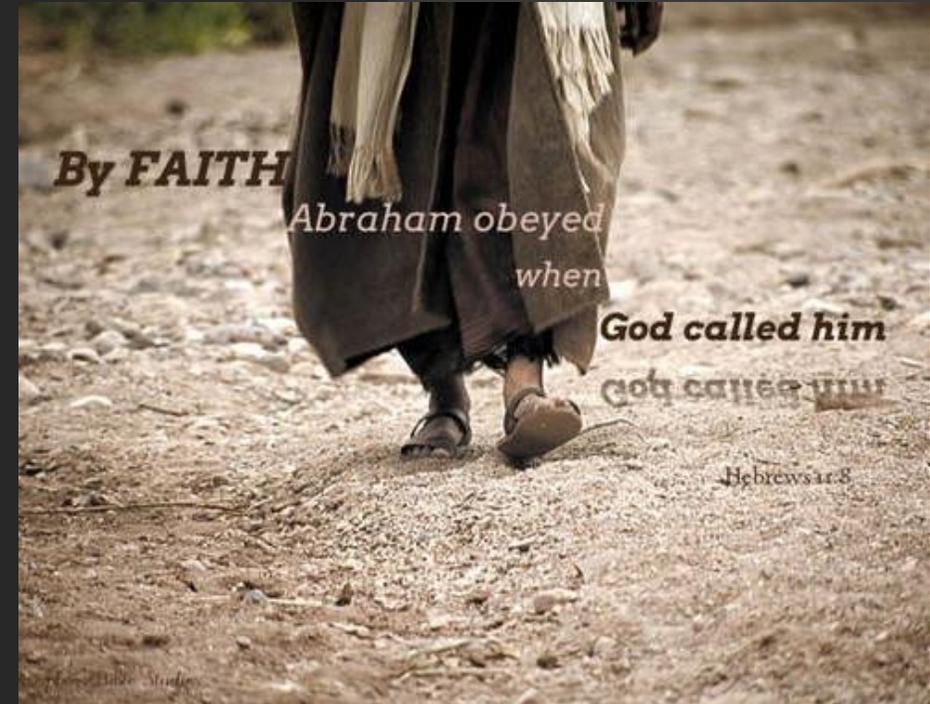
The act of faith is man's *response* to God who reveals himself (CCC, 142).

- Faith is first of all a personal adherence of man to God.
- It is a free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed" (CCC, 150).

By faith, man completely submits his intellect and his will to God. With his whole being man gives his assent to God the revealer. (CCC, 143).

The virtue of faith is a supernatural virtue which enables man, by enlightening his intellect and moving his will, to assent firmly to all that God has revealed, not because of the intrinsic evidence but because of the authority of God who is revealing.

Faith is to submit freely to the word that has been heard, *because its truth is guaranteed by God, who is Truth itself*. Not because we completely grasp it with our reason, but because its truth has been guaranteed by the one revealing (God).



Human Faith & Supernatural Faith

As personal adherence to God and assent to his truth, Christian faith differs from our faith in any human person. It is right and just to entrust oneself wholly to God and to believe absolutely what he says. It would be futile and false to place such faith in a creature.

The Characteristics of Faith

- Is a Gift
- Is a Human Act
- Is Free
- Is Certain
- Seeks understanding
- Faith & Reason
- Is Ecclesial
- Is Necessary
- Perseverance
- Is the Beginning of Eternal Life



Faith is a Grace



Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by him. Before faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist him; he must have the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts it to God, who opens the eyes of the mind and makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth.

Reason does not suffice to enable one to embrace the revealed truth; the gift of faith is necessary.

'Who do you say that I am?'

When St. Peter confessed that Jesus is the Son of the living God, Jesus declared to him that this revelation did not come "from flesh and blood", but from "my Father who is in heaven".

(Mt 16: 15-16)

Faith is a Human Act

Believing is possible only by grace and the interior helps of the Holy Spirit. But believing is also an authentically human act.

Trusting in God and the truths he has revealed is contrary neither to human freedom nor to human reason. Even in human relations it is not contrary to our dignity to believe what other persons tell us about themselves and their intentions, or to trust their promises (for example, when a man and a woman marry) to share a communion of life with one another. If this is so, still less is it contrary to our dignity to yield intellect and will to God who reveals, and to share in an interior communion with him.

In faith, the human intellect and will *co-operate* with divine grace.

"Believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth by command of the will moved by God through grace."



Faith is Free

To be human, man's response to God by faith must be free. The act of faith is of its very nature a free act. (CCC, 160).

Nobody is to be forced to embrace the faith against his will.

Christ invited people to faith and conversion, but never coerced them. His kingdom... grows by the love with which Christ, lifted up on the cross, draws men to himself.





Faith is Knowledge

Faith is a body of knowledge: by it we know natural and supernatural truths.

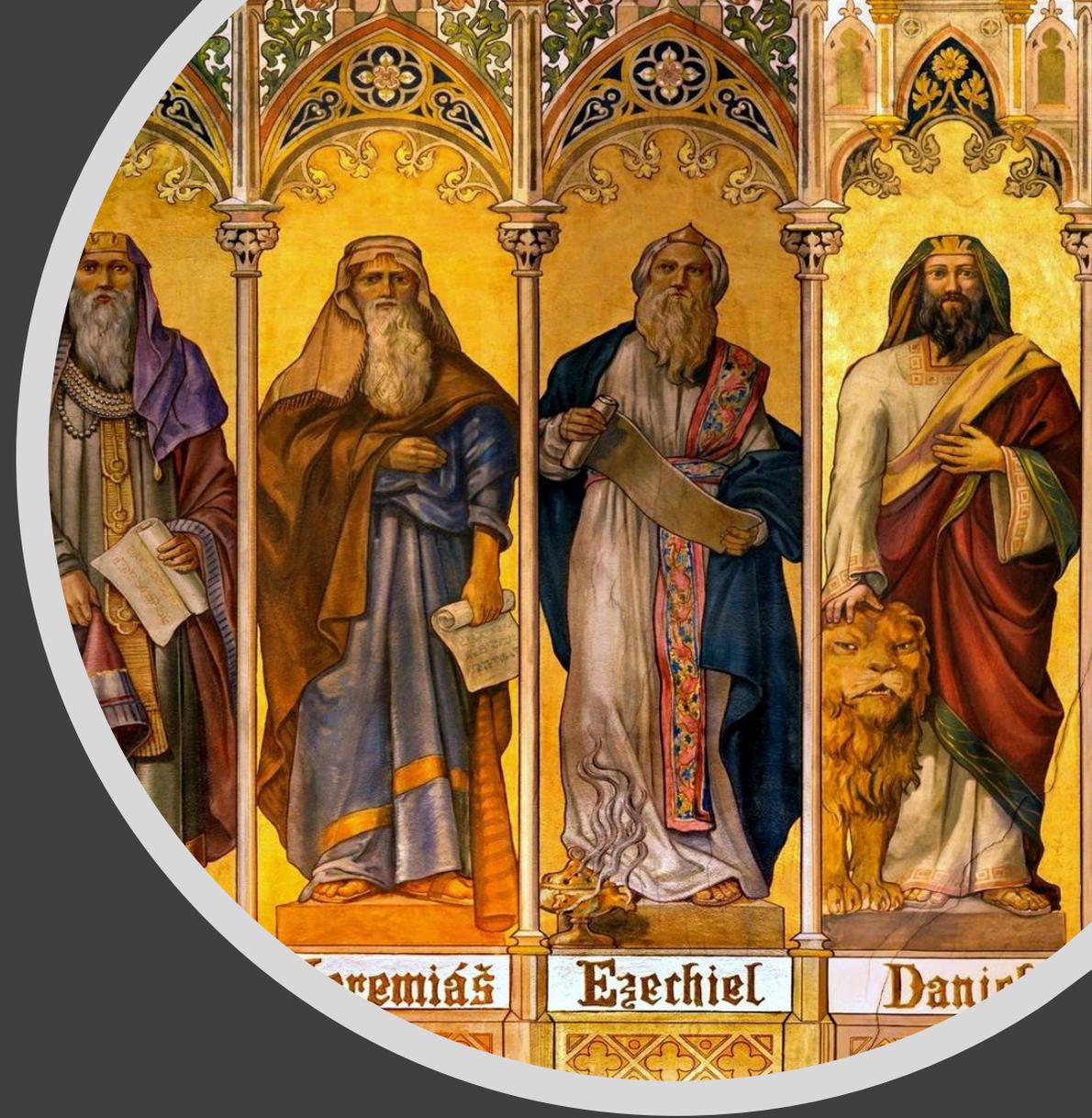
The apparent obscurity which the believer experiences comes from the limitations of human intelligence when faced with the overwhelming light of divine truth. Faith is an anticipation of the vision of God "face to face: in heaven (*1 Cor 13:12*; see *1 Jn 3:2*).

Theology: is the science of faith. It tries, with the help of reason, to grasp better the truths that we possess by faith; not in order to make them clearer in themselves – which is impossible – but to make them more intelligible to the believer. This effort, when authentic, stems from love for God and is accompanied by an effort to get closer to him. The greatest theologians have been and always will be the saints.

Motives of Credibility

What moves us to believe is not the fact that revealed truths appear as true and intelligible in the light of our natural reason: we believe 'because of the authority of God himself who reveals them, who can neither deceive nor be deceived'. "(CCC, 156).

- However, in order for the act of faith to be in accordance with reason, God wanted to give us external proofs which show that the assent of faith is by no means a blind impulse. These motives of credibility are sure signs that Revelation is the word of God. E.g.:
 - The miracles of Christ and the saints
 - Prophecies
 - The Church's growth and holiness, her fruitfulness and stability



Faith Seeks Understanding

A believer desires to know better the One in whom he has put his faith, and to understand better what He has revealed. A more penetrating knowledge will in turn call forth a greater faith, increasingly set afire by love.

The grace of faith opens "the eyes of your hearts" to a lively understanding of the contents of Revelation: that is, of the totality of God's plan and the mysteries of faith, of their connection with each other and with Christ, the centre of the revealed mystery. The Holy Spirit constantly perfects faith by his gifts, so that Revelation may be more and more profoundly understood. (CCC, 158)

"I believe, in order to understand; and I understand, the better to believe." (St Augustine)





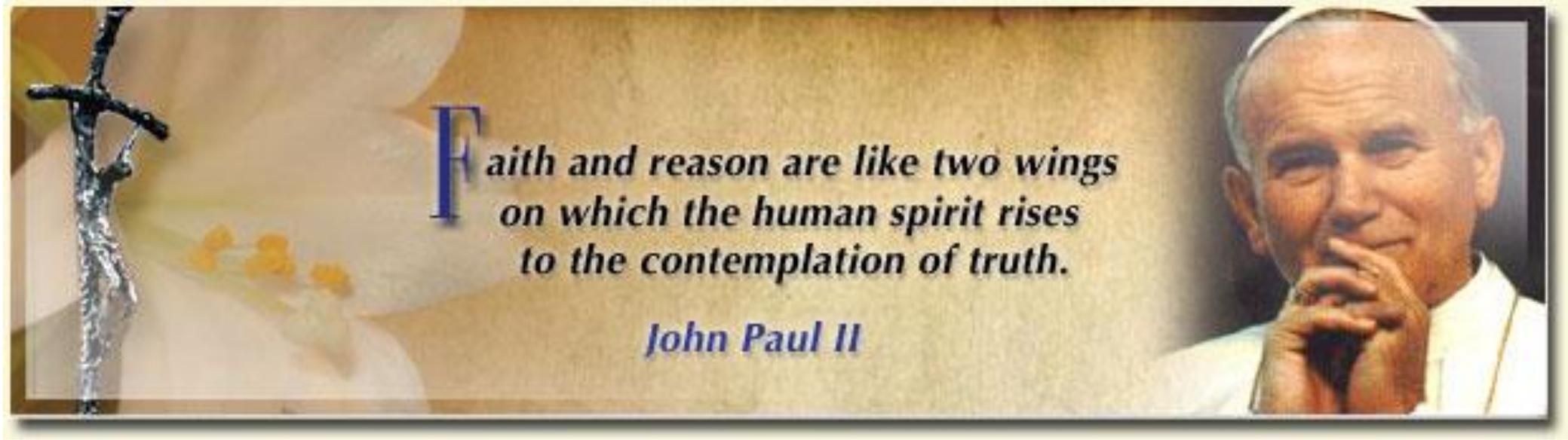
Faith is Certain

It is more certain than all human knowledge because it is founded on the very word of God who cannot lie (CCC, 157).

The certitude resulting from a divine light is greater than that which results from the light of natural reason.

To be sure, revealed truths can seem obscure to human reason and experience, but the certainty that the divine light gives is greater than that which the light of natural reason gives. "Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt."

Faith & Reason



Although faith is above reason, there can never be any real disagreement between faith and reason, since it is the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith and who has put the light of reason into the human soul.

Research in all branches of knowledge, provided it is carried out in a truly scientific manner and does not override moral laws, can never conflict with the faith, because the things of the world and the things of faith derive from the same God (CCC, 159).

It would be senseless to try to prove the supernatural truths of the faith. It is possible to one prove that anything which claims to be contrary to these truths is false.

Faith & Science

- Though faith is above reason, there can never be any real discrepancy between faith and reason. Since the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith has bestowed the light of reason on the human mind, God cannot deny himself, nor can truth ever contradict truth.
- Research in all branches of knowledge, provided it is carried out in a truly scientific manner and does not override moral laws, can never conflict with the faith, because the things of the world and the things of faith derive from the same God.
- The humble and persevering investigator of the secrets of nature is being led, as it were, by the hand of God in spite of himself, for it is God, the conserver of all things, who made them what they are. (CCC, 159)



Why are they seen as opposed/divorced today?

Science Works

- Idea that because science works it should work for everything
- But: science doesn't ask the ultimate questions (how v why)

Materialism

- Idea that the only realities are physical ones

Relativism

- Idea that different religions in times and places means we can only conclude that there is not truth/good/right or wrong
- But: Extreme relativism doesn't work. To say 'nothing is true' is to make a truth claim. To say 'everything is relative' is contradictory
- But: The fact that there are different faiths doesn't mean that faith is not universal. It also doesn't mean that there is no true answer

Religious Fundamentalism/Fideism

- Refusal to think or reason about faith



Fideism: Faith without Reason

Fides et Ratio:

Faith without reason can become superstition.

Reason without faith gets caught up in itself and stops asking the important questions.



The Faith of the Church

- Faith is a personal act, but it is not an isolated act. No one can believe alone, just as no one can live alone. The believer has received faith from others and should hand it on to others. Each believer is a link in the great chain of believers. (CCC, 166)
- “To believe” is an act of a believer as a member of the Church. One who believes, assents to the truth taught by the Church, which guards the deposit of Revelation.
- The Church’s faith precedes, engenders, supports and nourishes our faith. The Church is the mother of all believers” (CCC, 181)
- Salvation comes from God alone; but because we receive the life of faith through the Church, she is our mother: "We believe the Church as the mother of our new birth, and not in the Church as if she were the author of our salvation." Because she is our mother, she is also our teacher in the faith. (CCC, 169)



A wide-angle photograph of St. Peter's Square in Rome, Italy. The square is filled with a massive crowd of people, many wearing white, suggesting a religious event. In the background, the grand facade of St. Peter's Basilica is visible, featuring a large dome and classical architectural elements. The sky is clear and blue.

Unity of Faith

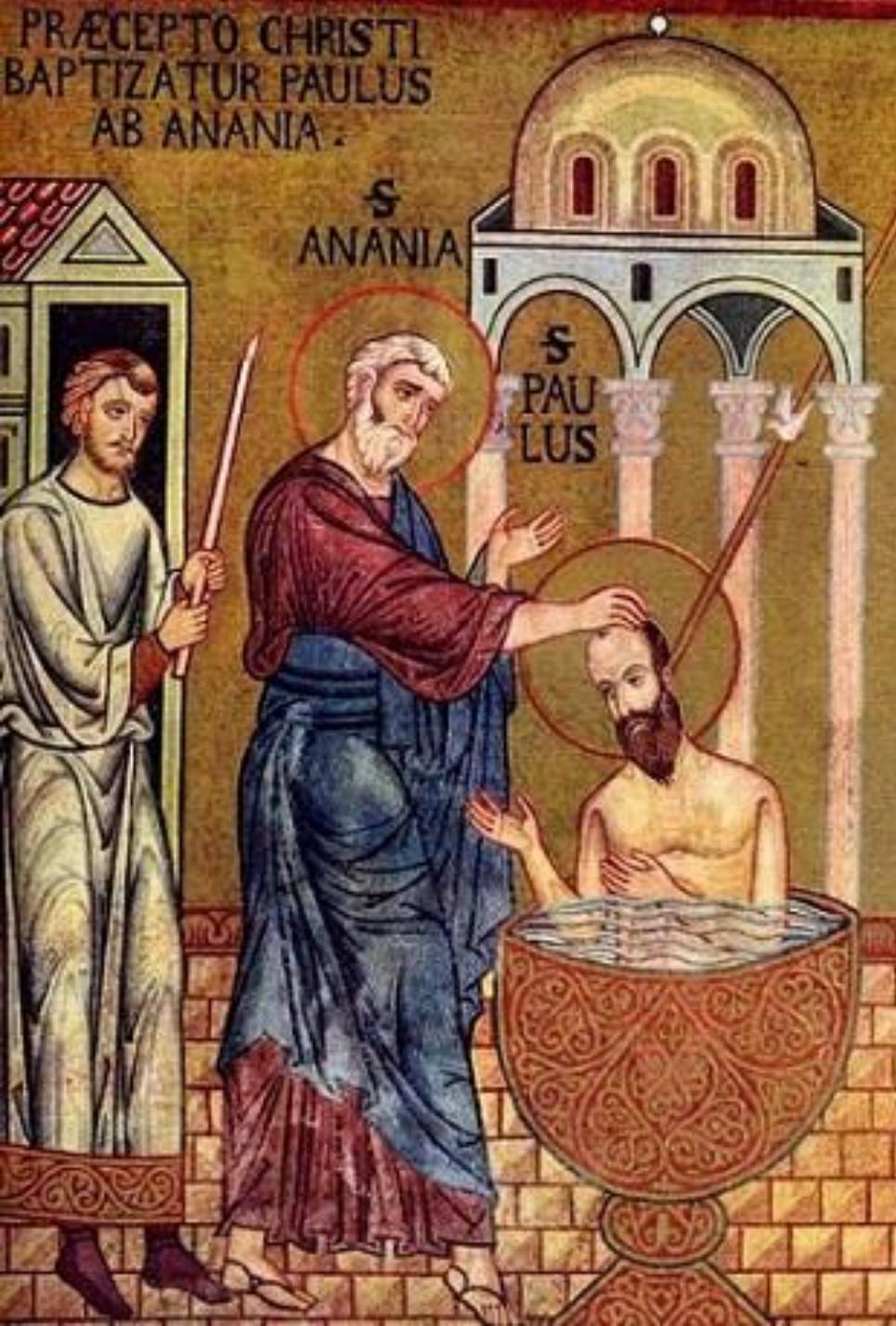
The Church, scattered throughout the whole world, having received the faith from the apostles & their disciples. . . guards it with care, & preaches, teaches & hands on this faith with a unanimous voice.

Through the centuries, in so many languages, cultures, peoples & nations, the Church has constantly confessed one faith, received from the one Lord, transmitted by one Baptism, & grounded in the conviction that all people have only one God & Father.

Though languages differ throughout the world, the content of the Tradition is one & the same. (CCC, 174)

The Churches established in Germany have no other faith or Tradition, nor do those of the Iberians, nor those of the Celts, nor those of the East, of Egypt, of Libya, nor those established at the centre of the world. . ."(St Irenaeus)

We guard the faith that we have received from the Church, for this deposit of great price is constantly being renewed under the action of the Holy Spirit. (CCC, 175)



Faith is necessary for salvation

"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mk 16:16).

"Without faith it is impossible to please [God]" (Heb 11:6).

- Believing in Jesus Christ and in the One who sent him is necessary for obtaining salvation. (CCC, 161)
- Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience, may achieve eternal salvation.

Perseverance in the Faith



Faith is a free gift that God makes to man. We can lose this priceless gift, as St. Paul indicated to St. Timothy:

"Wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith" (I Tim 1: 18–19).

To persevere in the faith until the end we can:

- Nourish it with the word of God
- Ask the Lord to increase our faith (Lk 17:5)
- Be "working through charity"
- Abound in hope
- Be united to the faith of the Church (CCC, 162)

Faith: the beginning of eternal life

When we contemplate the blessings of faith even now, it is as if we already possessed the wonderful things which our faith assures us we shall one day enjoy, when we shall see God "face to face", "as he is". So faith is already the beginning of eternal life:

Now, "we walk by faith, not by sight"; we perceive God as "in a mirror, dimly" and only "in part". Even though enlightened, faith is often lived in darkness and can be put to the test. The world we live in often seems very far from the one promised us by faith. Our experiences of evil and suffering, injustice and death, seem to contradict the Good News; they can shake our faith and become a temptation against it.

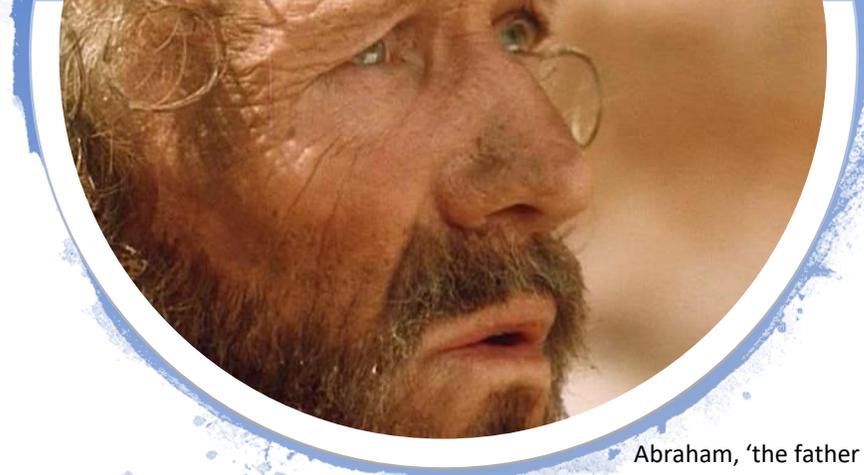
It is then we turn to the witnesses of faith: to Abraham, to the Virgin Mary who, in "her pilgrimage of faith", walked into the "night of faith" in sharing the darkness of her son's suffering and death; and to so many others. (CCC, 163-165)

Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. (Heb 12: 1-2)



Consistency between Faith & Life

- A Christian's entire life can be a manifestation of faith. Every corner of one's life should be illuminated by faith. "The just man lives by faith" (*Heb 2:4*). Faith works through charity (*Gal 5:6*) Without works, faith is dead (*Jas 2:20-26*).
- When this integrity of life is missing & one compromises with conduct that is not compatible with the faith, then faith is weakened & in danger of being lost.
- All Catholic faithful are obliged to avoid dangers to their faith.
- 'The believer has received faith from others & should hand it on to others.' (CCC, 166). The gift of faith is for sharing, not hiding.
- In their life and work, Catholics shape the whole of society with Christ's teachings & spirit.



Abraham, 'the father of all who believe' (Rom 4:11).



The Virgin Mary, 'blessed is she who believed' (Lk 1:45).