

Supplemental Information for
Why Catholic? Journey through the Catechism
The Profession of Faith: What We Believe
To group leaders of
Christ the King Parish, Springfield, Illinois

By Deacon Al Laabs
September/October, 2009

Session 3: “Faith: I Believe, We Believe”

Suggested Environment

You might consider adding to your regular environment, if you are fortunate to have in your home, your statue of the “Praying Hands.” If you don’t have a three dimensional one, you might try Google Images and just type in praying hands and you will be amazed at the variety you can copy, paste, and print. There is something very symbolic of faith in hands clasped like these.

Lifting Our Hearts

In this prayer from Psalm 111, there are many images of what we can call the “works of His hands” since work itself is so often seen in context with hands. God’s hands are being thanked for their wonderful deeds, their power, their redemption, and their faithfulness.



Reflection One “Responding in Faith”

I think there is something very heartwarming about that story of the immigrant parish and how their voices are joined in community as it is formed on basis of faith. When you think of it something similar always happens when we say the “Creed” on Sunday. Few of us can get through the Nicene Creed perfectly on our own but joined as a community we are of one voice and literally one heart and we can say it together, almost without missing an individual beat. I’d suggest reminding people to underline the words “...faith makes of their individual voices one heart and one mind” about eleven lines down in that first paragraph.

In the second paragraph the words “...God’s self-revelation to us is an act of friendship made out of love” should be underlines as they really summarize well last session’s key idea as

is the idea that we then respond to His invitation. Sometimes the idea of faith as a gift is difficult to understand since all of us know individuals who are lacking in faith. So if it's a gift, why doesn't everyone just have it? Well, I think it helps to see faith as gift in terms of a potential, a possibility that is all part of our being made in the image of our creator—sort of that idea of a fingerprint left in our being by the one who made us. It might help to think of faith as a gift tied in a ribbon that we all have and we all know that without opening up the gift, untying the ribbon, we never experience what it is and never look inside to discover what it means and how it relates to everything else we've been given.

There is a wonderful image in the beginning of the third paragraph of the Church too founded on an invitation the apostles received from Jesus himself. The stories of those who responded over time to God's invitation such as Moses, Abraham, Sarah, Joseph are all great examples but it is important to underline "Our perfect model of faith, of course, is Mary, whose whole life was a continual "yes" to God." If you have the time, I would recommend reading sections 60 to 65 in the document "The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church." There is a special section there on the role Mary plays in the life of the Church. [Here's the link to the entire document.](#)

It may help to tie together several thoughts from the previous sessions. We have this desire, this sense of God from creation itself, from our created, spiritual nature and when we bring the element of God's revelation to us, his gift, as we discussed last session, we can see how there is before us if we open our hearts and minds, quite honestly, an invitation to know God more completely. This invitation is reflected in the Church's role in the world to bring all men and women to Christ and certainly can be felt and ties in with the scripture chosen for the next section.

Scripture: Pondering the Word

Hebrews 11: 1-12

1

¹ Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence ² of things not seen.

2

Because of it the ancients were well attested.

3

By faith we understand that the universe was ordered by the word of God, ³ so that what is visible came into being through the invisible.

4

⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a sacrifice greater than Cain's. Through this he was attested to be righteous, God bearing witness to his gifts, and through this, though dead, he still speaks.

5

By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and "he was found no more because God had taken him." Before he was taken up, he was attested to have pleased God.

6

⁵ But without faith it is impossible to please him, for anyone who approaches God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

7

By faith Noah, warned about what was not yet seen, with reverence built an ark for the salvation of his household. Through this he condemned the world and inherited the righteousness that comes through faith.

8

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; he went out, not knowing where he was to go.

9

By faith he sojourned in the Promised Land as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs of the same promise;

10

for he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and maker is God.

11

By faith he received power to generate, even though he was past the normal age--and Sarah herself was sterile--for he thought that the one who had made the promise was trustworthy.

12

So it was that there came forth from one man, himself as good as dead, descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sands on the seashore

Note: this is taken from the USCCB site and I kept the first footnote since it has some good commentary on this passage. Other links should work as well.

¹ [1-40] This chapter draws upon the people and events of the Old Testament to paint an inspiring portrait of religious faith, firm and unyielding in the face of any obstacles that confront it. These pages rank among the most eloquent and lofty to be found in the Bible. They expand the theme announced in [Hebrews 6:12](#), to which the author now returns ([Hebrews 10:39](#)). The material of this chapter is developed chronologically. [Hebrews 11:3-7](#) draw upon the first nine chapters of Genesis (Genesis 1-9); [Hebrews 11:8-22](#), upon the period of the patriarchs; [Hebrews 11:23-31](#), upon the time of Moses; [Hebrews 11:32-38](#), upon the history of the judges, the prophets, and the Maccabean martyrs. The author gives the most extensive description of faith provided in the New Testament, though his interest does not lie in a technical, theological definition. In view of the needs of his audience he describes what authentic faith does, not what it is in itself. Through faith God guarantees the blessings to be hoped for from him, providing evidence in the gift of faith that what he promises will eventually come to pass ([Hebrews 11:1](#)). Because they accepted in faith God's guarantee of the future, the biblical personages discussed in [Hebrews 11:3-38](#) were themselves commended by God ([Hebrews 11:2](#)). Christians have even greater reason to remain firm in faith since they, unlike the Old Testament men and women of faith, have perceived the beginning of God's fulfillment of his messianic promises ([Hebrews 11:39-40](#)).

Sharing Questions

In addition to discussing who is your favorite person of faith in scripture, you might consider reflecting with your group on perhaps an individual's experience with someone who helped lead them to their own faith, their parents, a spouse, a religious, or just a close friend at that crucial time in their life. If you have someone who came through RCIA you might even encourage them to discuss what it was that led them to open up that "gift" of faith and become a member of the Church.

Reflection Two: "Faith: A Journey With God?"

That first paragraph mentions our human experience of relationships that grow and develop over time. Those who are married can certainly testify to this experience. So the journey of faith as discussed here should have some parallels with our human experience. Certainly emphasize growing and strengthening faith through Word and Sacrament, the two major components of each Mass we celebrate.

I would specially point out on page 20 the highlighted box and the center paragraph that emphasizes the role faith plays in salvation, and suggest reading out loud *CCC, 161*. Pages 37 to 39 in the *USCCA* expand the questions asked on page 21. I would especially recommend that you discuss the idea of faith as "both personal and communal." See if you can get others to voice a sense of how our praying and worshiping together on Sunday's in particular has a wonderful effect on strengthening our very personal faith through sharing in community.

This is important to sense and feel because of the truth that our culture and often what is happening in the world can present challenges to faith. Sometimes it can be very discouraging to leave Church, turn on the radio or television and hear of some disaster, natural or manmade, that can leave us wondering where God is in all that is going on around us. Perhaps it helps to recall that we are on a journey towards our true home and that God is indeed with us even when it is sometimes hard to make sense out of what we hear and see. It is in this sense, of making sense out of our struggle with such feelings and questions that we need to turn to our Church for guidance, assistance and even support.

So on the top of page 22 that first paragraph makes a great point of emphasizing how much we need guidance from our Church as we together as a believing community struggle with the rapid changes in society, with new technology, and so often with questions as to how we apply the Gospel message, the Good News to this important aspect of life or this challenge. It goes on to emphasize how being a disciple of Christ individually and collectively calls for a response from us personally as well as it should from those collective organizations we form as communities, namely our political society. We have this apparent goal of separation of Church and state in the US and yet as believers we know that political life, our life as a community, can never be completely devoid of values and support for the most basic of values we have in common, namely life itself. So the Church and our role as leaven to the world can never be far

from the defense of life and policies that pleads for social justice for all. Having said this, it is good to realize and someone may point this out, that there is always going to be tension between these two directions. One stems from a God who reveals himself to us and whose Spirit guides the Church in teaching values and the other direction comes through a democratic process where values often result from a majority vote. Seen in that context, the tension is understandable.

Sharing Our Faith

All of these are excellent questions and that first bullet point ties in with what I mentioned earlier, the idea of asking if individuals would like to mention some special person who in a sense led them to their faith or influenced them greatly. It is a key idea to understand the “my faith” as a sort of grown up faith that I now own. Often college age young people or even sometimes those in high school have this difficult transition to make from the “faith of their youth,” inherited from their parents especially if cradle Catholics to that mature, independent faith of a young adult. That third bullet point which asks “what will I do to help my faith grow stronger” is also important and perhaps you can ask for ideas from the group of what they think helps a person’s faith to grow. Here’s a link to a sample of a publication especially for [Catholics who want to grow their faith](#).

You might share with them this little thought from Fr. Peter Harman who is now at the Cathedral. He was talking one day about the guidance the Church gives us in moral areas and he made the observation that when we want to get somewhere, we use a road map or perhaps even Google our direction. So it seems to make sense to a person of faith to look to an organization that has been a roadmap for nearly 2000 years for guidance when we are looking for direction, for meaning and for purpose in our very lives. He added, when we’re lost, if we can overcome our pride, we ask direction from someone who seems to know where they are and can point us in the right direction. So it is with the Church. If we ask what the Church teaches and guides, then we have to have the humility and willingness to listen. You might point individuals to pages 40 and 41 of the *USCCA* for some insights and wisdom from John Henry Cardinal Newman on the issue of obedience and willingness to listen to what the Church has to say.

Living the Good News

It certainly seems that this particular opening session would point toward a much more personal, rather than group, response to highlighting or more fully appreciating or understanding the presence or role of faith in our lives. I especially like the third bullet point of contacting someone who has been influential or a sign of faith to you and share your gratitude and appreciation for their gift to you. And then it seems to me that each of us who has faith should take time to say prayers of gratitude for its role in our lives this coming week.

Lifting our Hearts

You will find me encouraging each group to open up the closing to spontaneous prayer for all the variety of intentions that we always do carry in our hearts so suggest going around the room/group to ask each person present to pray for a specific intention. So be a good example and start using our CTK format: EG; For a deeper appreciation for faith in all of our lives and in thanksgiving for this gift of faith and the community in which we are fellow pilgrims, let us pray to the Lord. Group response: Lord, hear our prayer. And then ending on the Apostles Creed is a good note

Addendum Note: Any feedback you would like to give is most welcome. Please reply to allaabs@comcast.net