

30. January 2021

“The bright light of faith”

Heb 11:1-2,8-19

Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of realities that are unseen. It is for their faith that our ancestors are acknowledged. It was by faith that Abraham obeyed the call to set out for a country that was the inheritance given to him and his descendants, and that he set out without knowing where he was going. By faith he sojourned in the Promised Land as though it were not his, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. He looked forward to the well-founded city, designed and built by God. It was equally by faith that Sarah, in spite of being past the age, was made able to conceive, because she believed that he who had made the promise was faithful to it. Because of this, there came from one man, and one who already had the mark of death on him, descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the grains of sand on the seashore which cannot be counted. All these died in faith, before receiving any of the things that had been promised, but they saw them in the far distance and welcomed them, recognising that they were only strangers and nomads on earth. People who use such terms about themselves make it quite plain that they are in search of a homeland. If they had meant the country they came from, they would have had the opportunity to return to it; but in fact they were longing for a better homeland, their heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, since he has founded the city for them. It was by faith that Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He offered to sacrifice his only son even though he had yet to receive what had been promised, and he had been told: Isaac is the one through whom your name will be carried on. He was confident that God had the power even to raise the dead; and so, figuratively speaking, he was given back Isaac from the dead.

We all know the saying that faith can move mountains (*cf. Mt 17:20*).

In the Gospel we are repeatedly addressed to faith (*cf. e.g. Mk 5:34*), sometimes also to the lack of faith (*cf. e.g. Mt 16:8*), which stands in the way of God unfolding all his care and love for us or making himself present through miracles.

On the other hand, there are testimonies of great faith in which God glorifies himself!

If even the disciples who were following Jesus asked for their faith to be strengthened (*cf. Lk 17:5*), then faith is often not so self-evident for us. By this I do not mean the general faith in the truth of the Gospel, but the concretisation of faith in the respective life situation, the firm trust in God's helping presence, who will direct all things to good.

The first sentence of the text gives a key to why it is sometimes difficult to have faith: *“Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of realities that are unseen.”*

It is not always easy for us not to consider the certainties offered to us by the visible and tangible world as first-rate. Very quickly, we speak of realism and believe that we have gained a world view that we can rely on. One regulates things oneself, plans them and takes reason as a guiding star. But with this we are primarily moving in the realm of the visible world. However, as soon as questions arise that touch on the invisible world, that enter uncertain and not easily calculable areas, the previous patterns of explanation fade and one seems rather disoriented.

Another guiding star is needed:

This is a faithful world view in which reason takes its rightful place and requires enlightenment through faith. It is faith as a theological virtue that connects us directly with God and begins to open up the invisible world to us.

Faith is the highest light on earth, which is surpassed in eternity by the direct contemplation of God. Even if St. Paul says that here on earth we still look through a dark mirror (*cf. 1 Cor 13:12*), the light of faith shines brightly in the darkness.

Let us look at Abraham: *“It was by faith that Abraham obeyed the call to set out for a country that was the inheritance given to him and his descendants, and that he set out without knowing where he was going.”*

We notice that here reason already has its limits or we would have to appeal to a higher reason. This would be a reason enlightened by faith that knows that when God asks something, He has provided all that is necessary, for He is our loving Father, even if I cannot see it.

Through faith, God can concretely implement his plans of salvation with us. It is, so to speak, the bridge that God chooses to make the invisible world, his presence,

his being, his action knowable to us. God himself awakens faith in us and now, through every act of faith that we perform, he can make his presence and his action more present. On this path, it becomes natural for us to live and act in faith in God.

Abraham follows God's call because he believed in him and trusted him even to a point that can make one shudder in terms of willingness to sacrifice his son.

Let us think of St Agnes, whom we got to know better through the radio play of Harpa Dei. Even when she was already taken to the brothel, she held fast in faith to God and he saved her from disgrace.

So we can “Stand firm in what is hoped for, be convinced of things not seen.” because we trust God and His goodness. It is not unrealistic dreaming and following our own fantasies and desires and “claiming” God for it, but it is a believing realism.

If we know that God is our kind Father, then we can rely on Him for everything. Then this is a holy realism that is also accessible to our reason. We learn to understand our lives from God and to perceive his guidance. This becomes self-evident with growing faith and encompasses the visible and invisible world.

Such a path asks that we base our lives entirely on God, that he is our security far beyond our transient and supposed earthly securities.

Faith lives out of God and this is very gratifying. The fearful and often tense self-security of life fades away. Instead, a great trust grows which can become as indomitable as it was with Abraham and our St. Agnes.

We should especially ask for this faith in these apocalyptic times. So let us hold fast to the fact that the Lord leads everything to good according to his will, even if we are not able to see it ourselves!