

3. May 2021

**“Faithfulness to the Tradition”  
Feast of Saints Philip and James, Apostles**

*1 Cor 15:1-8*

*I want to make quite clear to you, brothers, what the message of the gospel that I preached to you is; you accepted it and took your stand on it, and you are saved by it, if you keep to the message I preached to you; otherwise your coming to believe was in vain. The tradition I handed on to you in the first place, a tradition which I had myself received, was that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried; and that on the third day, he was raised to life, in accordance with the scriptures; and that he appeared to Cephas; and later to the Twelve; and next he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still with us, though some have fallen asleep; then he appeared to James, and then to all the apostles. Last of all he appeared to me too, as though I was a child born abnormally.*

At what level do we actually accept the Gospel and come to faith?

Many of us will have grown up in faith and received the Gospel in a certain “organic naturalness”. When a real life of faith emerges from this, then faith grows and matures with the help of the reception of the sacraments and the daily living out of faith and the steps of a deeper conversion. However, this only happens when faith takes the first place in a person's life and life is shaped from it.

Others may have left the natural ways of faith under the impression of “other offers” or no longer cultivated them, other things have come to the fore or sin has not allowed the life of grace to unfold in them. But then, through the grace of God, they experience a return to faith, a conversion, the awakening of a lost identity and love, a homecoming into what is known - and yet everything becomes new for them.

Still others grow up without the faith and one day get to know it all over again and experience the grace of the first conversion; usually they overflow with gratitude.

So what is happening in all of them, and what does the Apostle mean by saying, “*otherwise your coming to believe was in vain*”?

The Holy Scriptures testify to us that no one can come to God unless drawn by the Father (*cf. Jn 6:44*). This grace acts on our spirit; it is a light of knowledge that is not gained at the level of the intellect, but which communicates itself freely. This can also pass on to our feelings, so that, for example, a conversion experience can be a great emotional event with strong feelings. The dispositions to receive this light are different and not infrequently not accessible to us at all. Why one person experiences a conversion and another does not, is not open to us, because the ways of God are often hidden for us in this. So it makes little sense to want to explore this. But it is all the more an invitation to pray for people's conversion and to deepen one's own.

But this we can note:

First, what the text sets before us and calls us to is faithfulness to the tradition of faith. The word of the Gospel does not change! We can go deeper into the truths of the faith, but it is the identical faith that has been handed on to us. It even says here, “...*if you keep to the message I preached to you*”.

A second point is that we agree with the faith we have received as a gift of the Holy Spirit with our minds and our reasoning. Faith is a supernatural light and therefore superior to reason, but it is also reasonable, and we should therefore appropriate it with the natural powers given to us.

A third point is that we should always keep in mind the core themes of the faith - especially in evangelisation: “*Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried; and that on the third day, he was raised to life, in accordance with the scriptures; and that he appeared to Cephas; and later to the Twelve*”.

So let us take away from the text today: We, who are allowed to live in faith by the grace of God and have received it in various ways, are to hold fast to the faith handed down to us, affirm it with our powers of reason and both internalise the core truth of the faith and pass it on to others. If we do this, our lives will be fruitful.