

18. February 2023

Aspects of faith

Hb 11:1-7

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 is by faith that we understand that the ages were created by a word from God, so that from the invisible the visible world came to be. It was because of his faith that Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain, and for that he was acknowledged as upright when God himself made acknowledgement of his offerings. Though he is dead, he still speaks by faith. It was because of his faith that Enoch was taken up and did not experience death: he was no more, because God took him; because before his assumption he was acknowledged to have pleased God. Now it is impossible to please God without faith, since anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and rewards those who seek him. It was through his faith that Noah, when he had been warned by God of something that had never been seen before, took care to build an ark to save his family. His faith was a judgement on the world, and he was able to claim the uprightness which comes from faith.'

Faith is a theological virtue. This means that it is God Himself who infuses it. It is a gift that makes us partakers of the knowledge of God, which means that already in our earthly life we are able to recognise Him, even if it is as through a mirror, in a blurred and partial way, as St. Paul says (1 Cor 13:12).

This would not be possible for us with reason alone, for reason alone is limited to natural knowledge. Certainly reason can recognise through the works of creation that God exists (Rom 1:20) and can even get some of his properties right; but it is not capable of knowing God in Himself.

Let us take an example: we know that God is triune by the light of faith. The understanding could not discover this truth by itself; it can only try to understand what faith tells it. The same could be said about all dogmas and we will always come to the same conclusion: it is faith that enables us to know something about God.

So then faith is a bright light which is given to us but which we must also embrace with our will. At the same time, faith is also a dark light, in that we cannot yet contemplate without a veil the truths it reveals to us. But this is what awaits us in eternity, when we have passed from believing to seeing.

From these considerations, today's reading is illuminating: "*Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of realities that are unseen*".

As Christians, we hope for the eternal life that Jesus promises us if we complete our life in God's grace. We live already in the expectation of this other life; but in a way, eternal life already begins here and now, when we live according to our faith. Through faith, God's truth can penetrate deeper and deeper into us and we learn to look at things, circumstances, other people and our own life in the light of this faith. The conviction of what we hope for becomes firmer and firmer, because in the light of faith everything is revealed to us more deeply.

But, as we have said, there is also the obscurity of faith, for we cannot yet see things in their fullness, nor can we verify them through our senses, as is the case in scientific experimentation. People want to know, they want to rely on their knowledge and experience. Believers can also have crises of faith, especially when they experience painful situations that are difficult to understand with reason and the heart.

In this case, the essential thing is that one wants to believe, for example, in the goodness of God and His wise Providence. Thus, when thoughts or feelings arise that cast doubt on these truths, we cling to believe in God's goodness, with an act of the will and with prayer, even if inwardly we cannot feel it at that moment. This is, so to speak, an "act of naked faith", a kind of "somersault" into faith, while our emotions pretend to tell us otherwise.

Today's reading introduces us to some witnesses of faith. Today I would like to focus on Noah. He believed God and built the ark with "religious fear", as the Apostle says. This term refers to an important element for our spiritual life: it is the obedience of faith. That is to say, I owe obedience to that which I have accepted by faith. This concept becomes more concrete when one is obedient, for example, to the authentic doctrine of the Church and her moral teaching. For she (the Church) has been

entrusted with the task of watching over the faith and drawing from it the concrete way of acting for the faithful in the various situations of life.

God, who has given us the wonderful gift of faith, wants us to live it, to increase it and to use it in a concrete way. It is striking that Jesus, after miraculously healing a person, often said to him: "*your faith has restored you to health*" (Mk 5:34). Putting faith into practice is like the condition on our part for God to be able to work. He wants us to believe, and it is becoming clear to us why.

Faith glorifies God and ennobles man. God is glorified because man, when he believes, puts his trust in Him and in His revelation, even though he does not see it. Man gives God a "vow of trust", to put it in human terms: he believes God more than himself! This obviously glorifies God, for it enables Him to act and to manifest His love more and more. The believer becomes a witness of His work and His love and, in turn, proclaims God's glory. Mary, the Mother of God, believed the angel and, greeting Elizabeth, exclaimed: "*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord*" (Lk 1:46).

Through faith a person is ennobled, because already in this earthly life he consciously participates in the reign of God. Thanks to faith, he already lives his vocation as a child of God here on earth and discovers more and more what God has called him to life for.

We can and must ask the Lord to increase our faith (cf. Lk 17:5-10). It will never be great enough; but the greater it is, the more glory it will give to God, whose name is to be known throughout the whole world.