

CONNECT!

BRINGING FAITH TO LIFE



saint mary's press



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Chapter 6

Faith: Responding to God

KEY WORDS

creed

faith

monotheistic

Often people say you need to have faith. They might say, “Keep the faith” or “Have faith in God.” Has anyone ever asked if you have faith in God? Have you ever considered what your response would be? Maybe your first thought was, “Yes, of course I do!” Maybe this is the first time you have ever thought about it, so you do not have a quick answer. Maybe you are just not sure what you believe. Just considering the question is one of the first steps of faith. This chapter looks into what having faith means. Afterward, you may realize you have more faith than you thought you did.



CONNECT with GOD

Jesus, I am like the man who cried out to you: “I do believe, help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). Sometimes it seems like my faith is as small as a mustard seed. But with even that much faith, you said I could do anything. With you nothing is impossible. I place my trust in you, knowing you will not disappoint me. Amen.

What Is Faith?

Throughout history, God has called upon people to follow his will. **Faith** is the way people respond to God’s call. On a simple level, faith means a



faith ➔ Believing and accepting that God made himself known to us through his words and actions, especially through Jesus Christ. It is accepting God’s truth with our minds and allowing it to guide our entire lives.

belief in God. For Christians it means more than that. Faith is believing and accepting that God made himself known to us through his words and actions, especially through Jesus Christ. It is accepting God's truth with our minds and our hearts. Faith is something that guides our entire lives.

In a way it would be simple to say, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who is our Savior." It would be easy if that was all that was required for salvation. But having faith also requires us to live our lives based on this belief. The following short story illustrates this point.

A two-year-old girl is playing on a wooden playground structure that has all sorts of slides, swings, and



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Being a faith-filled person does not mean all your questions will be answered. It also does not mean you will never have another doubt. God is mysterious, and it is part of your human nature to ask questions about who he is and about our faith in him. But your questions can bring you closer to God. How could bringing your doubts and questions to God in prayer be helpful in your spiritual life? What questions do you have for God?

ropes to climb. She runs toward a ledge near where her mother is standing. As she gets closer to the ledge, her mother smiles and moves closer because she knows exactly what is going to happen. The little girl stops at the edge of the five-foot drop and starts to laugh. Then she throws her arms up over her head and flings her body into the air toward her mother. As the mom has done a hundred times before, she reaches out and catches the girl. The girl is not even finished with her laughing before she runs back around to make the jump again.

To leap into her mother's arms, the girl has to have faith in her mother. She has to trust that her mother will catch her. Leaping is just the final step in her act of faith. Because she believes and trusts her mother, it is the natural thing to do. A person with faith in God is like the child who leaps into the hands of her mother.

Faith Is a Gift Freely Chosen

Faith is necessary for salvation and is a gift from God. Someone cannot have faith without the Holy Spirit, who helps us see our need for God. Before a person can have this gift of faith, they must first have the freedom to choose it. Being faithful can be achieved only by someone who understands and freely chooses to believe in God and his Church.

You might think, "My parents force me to go to Mass and practice my faith, so how can I ever freely choose it?" Think of it this way. What would you do if someone offered you a box and said that if you accepted it, you would have to carry it around for the rest of your life? You would want to know what was in the box before you made a decision, right? Without looking inside it, you cannot really make a choice. The box is like the faith God wants to give you. It often comes to you through the words and examples of your parents. If you are ever going to choose to accept the faith God offers, you must look into it. You have to learn about it before you accept it. Only then can you really make a free and informed decision.

believe

Faith Is Believing

Having faith means you believe or accept something to be true. Christians believe in the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. At Mass, we declare our core beliefs when we pray the Nicene Creed. A **creed** is an official statement of one's faith, or what one believes.

Believing is also an act of the entire Church. Don't confuse *Church*—with a capital C—with a building. The Church is the community of faithful people who put their faith in Jesus Christ. In a way, your Church is your family. It is the Church that teaches you. It is the Church that is a role model for you. It is the Church that supports and nourishes your faith. Without your family and the Church, there is no one to pass on the faith.

Belief is not the end of the road when it comes to having faith. In fact, believing is only the beginning. Belief is the foundation on which the rest of our faith is built.

Faith Is Trusting

Having faith also means you trust. Trust is when you confidently turn control of your life (or part of your life) over to someone or something else with hope. If you have ever worked on a school project with others, you know what it is like to trust. Working hard on your part of the project, you trust that your partners will complete their parts. You have given some of the control of your grade to your partners with hope that they will do their jobs.

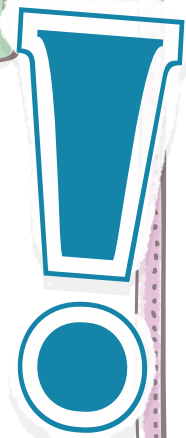


creed ➡ A statement of what one believes. The Nicene and Apostles' Creeds are the Church's most important creeds.

CHECK *this* OUT

The “Heart” of Our Beliefs

The word *belief* can be traced back to Old English and Old High German words that mean “to hold dear and to love.” The word *creed* can be traced back to two Latin words, *cor* and *do*. *Cor* means “heart,” and *do* means “I give.” So when we say our creed, or our beliefs, we are doing more than just saying the things that we think. We are stating what is in our hearts. A creed is the set of beliefs to which our hearts are devoted.



When we trust God, we acknowledge that we cannot ever be truly happy without him. We can do our part, but without God, our “project,” which is our lives, will never be complete. So having faith means we trust God—we put God in control of our lives.

Trusting God is a required ingredient of faith (see Matthew 17:20). Trusting him does not mean things will always go the way we want them to go. Human beings are not perfect. We often bring much misery and pain upon ourselves. By trusting God and allowing him to lead our lives, we will give and receive more joy and happiness in this world and in the next.



PRAYING TOGETHER

Prayer of the Faithful

Every time we celebrate Mass, we offer our petitions, or requests, in what is called the Prayer of the Faithful. Here we ask God to fulfill our needs. In doing so, we trustfully place our needs in God's hands. It does not mean that we expect God to give us all that we ask for.

God does not grant our every wish. We do not always understand why. Nonetheless, we trust that he will provide what is best for us. Next time during the Prayer of the Faithful, offer your own needs to God and trust that he will provide what is best for you.

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Faith Is Doing

Finally, having faith means you do something about it. Doing means you act upon what you believe. In fact, without the doing, someone could argue that you don't have faith at all. You may have heard the saying "Actions speak louder than words." This means we see the true significance of ideas or beliefs when they are put into action. This applies to faith too. Your actions make real your belief and trust in God.



The Letter of James says it best, as follows:

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,” but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (2:14–17)

Faith in God Alone

Christianity is **monotheistic**, meaning Christians believe in only one God. Yet even we who call ourselves Christians do not always completely place our trust in God alone. Instead, we sometimes look to money or worldly power for our protection. We can also spend too much time and attention trying to get lots of stuff. We begin to think we can be happy only when we have the best sports equipment, the newest technology, or whatever new thing catches our eye. Those things become like false gods when we forget that our true happiness can be found in God only. None of us is perfect, but as our faith in God grows, we will not allow anyone or anything to substitute for him. God is our true



good
to **KNOW**

When God promised Abraham and Sarah that they would be the parents of many descendants, they were so old that Sarah laughed at the thought. But Abraham and Sarah kept their faith in God. When their son was born, they named him Isaac, a Hebrew name that means “laughter.”



monotheistic



Describing the belief that there is only one God.

home, and we will be truly satisfied only by doing his will and being with him. The Book of Deuteronomy reminds us that “the LORD is our God, the LORD alone!” (6:4)

Some Christians have chosen to give up all they have to place their faith in God alone. Some missionaries, for example, leave their homes to work in the poorest areas of the world. They choose to abandon the comfort and security of their homes. Led by their belief in the Good News of Jesus Christ, they trust God’s call and act upon it.

Even Jesus was tempted to rely on something other than God. When he was in the desert, the devil tried to convince Jesus to look for material things and worldly power to save himself. Jesus replied: “Get away, Satan! It is written: / ‘The Lord, your God, shall you worship / and him alone shall you serve’” (Matthew 4:10).



LIVING the GOSPEL

Small Things, Great Love

Saint Mother Teresa is a wonderful inspiration for those who want to be faithful to God. But the stories about saintly people like her overwhelm many people. Many might think, “I could never be as great as she was,” and then decide to do nothing. Saint Mother Teresa did not see herself as someone great. She saw her work as simple—not easy, just simple. She read the Gospels. She believed in Jesus’ call to serve those who are the neediest in our world. She trusted that God would help her. Then she went out and did it. When asked about her work, she emphasized that faithful people did not have to help the entire world. They just needed to help one person. She said, “We do no great things, only small things with great love” (Rai and Chawla, *Faith and Compassion: The Life and Work of Mother Teresa*). What is a small thing you can do with great love?



PEOPLE of FAITH

Saint MOTHER TERESA

Saint Mother Teresa (1910–1997) was a woman of great faith. She was born Gonxha Agnes Bojaxhiu in 1910 in Skopje, Macedonia. At age eighteen, she joined the Sisters of Loreto and took the name Teresa after Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. Teresa served as a schoolteacher in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), India, for almost twenty years.

Following an encounter with Christ in which she heard him tell her, “Come, be my light,” Teresa was inspired to help those who suffered from the most extreme poverty. In 1948, after a few years of prayer and determination, Mother Teresa received permission to leave her convent to work with the poor in the streets of Kolkata. She soon formed the Missionaries of Charity, who set up hospitals and homes for the dying. In 1979, this “saint of the gutters” was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her work. By the 1990s, the Missionaries of Charity could be found all over the world, helping homeless people, abused women, and orphans, as well as those suffering from AIDS, drug addiction, and other illnesses.

Saint Mother Teresa died in 1997. She left behind a thriving order of priests, nuns, and laypersons devoted to the service of the neediest people in our world. Pope John Paul II beatified Mother Teresa in 2002. After she died, her private letters revealed that she had overcome many years of spiritual doubt and anguish. Despite these feelings, she trusted God and kept hard at work at her mission.

