

Conference III: Living Our Faith (Final)

Introduction:

We have seen models of people who have lived the faith.

In his beautiful letter to the Hebrew Christian community St. Paul says:

since we for our part are surrounded by this cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every encumbrance of sin which clings to us and persevere in running the race which lies ahead; let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith. (Heb 12:1-2)

We have also examined how we celebrate our Faith in our relationship with our God.

Now we see how we might put our faith into action as we “persevere in running the race that lies ahead.”

When we talk about putting our faith in action the first question we ask is...

“Who am I?”

The second question we ask is, “What is faith?”

The third question we ask is,

“What does it mean when we say ‘put faith into action’ “?

I Who Am I?

Who am I? How do you answer that question?

How do you identify yourself?

Our culture usually identifies us as an individual – Joe... a worker – truck driver or lawyer... a family man or a single... How do you identify yourself?

Amnesia

In our self sufficiency

Our productivity

Our numbness

Our dumbness

We suffer amnesia

In our wants and desires

We are uninhibited buyers

And tryers

Or everything new

And we suffer amnesia

We stroll our malls

Its sacred halls

Its overflowing stalls

We're not appalled

We suffer amnesia

So many uncaring

Unnoticing

Uninterested

From the Desk of Donald Ware, C.P.

*Ungrateful...
We suffer amnesia*

*A profound, prolonged
Fearless forgetting
A heartless, headless
Thankless and thoughtless
Amnesia*

*Who is our God?
Where is our God?
Do we ever hear God?
Fear God?
Feel God?
Know God?
Love God?*

*Or are we amnesiacs,
Forever forgetting?*

Here's a story... A Child of God...

A seminary professor was vacationing with his wife in Gatlinburg , TN. One morning, they were eating breakfast at a little restaurant, hoping to enjoy a quiet, family meal. While they were waiting for their food, they noticed a distinguished looking, white-haired man moving from table to table, visiting with the guests. The professor leaned over and whispered to his wife, 'I hope he doesn't come over here.' But sure enough, the man did come over to their table.

*'Where are you folks from?' he asked in a friendly voice.
"Oklahoma" they answered.*

*'Great to have you here in Tennessee,' the stranger said. 'What do you do for a living?'
'I teach at a seminary,' he replied.*

*'Oh, so you teach preachers how to preach, do you? Well, I've got a really great story for you.'
And with that, the gentleman pulled up a chair and sat down at the table with the couple.*

The professor groaned and thought to himself, 'Great ... Just what I needanother preacher story!'

The man started, 'See that mountain over there? (pointing out the restaurant window). Not far from the base of that mountain, there was a boy born to an unwed mother. He had a hard time growing up, because every place he went, he was always asked the same question, 'Hey boy, who's your daddy?' Whether he was at school, in the grocery store or drug store, people would ask the same question, 'Who's your daddy?'

He would hide at recess and lunch time from other students. He would avoid going into stores

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because that question hurt him so bad. 'When he was about 12 years old, a new preacher came to his church. He would always go in late and slip out early to avoid hearing the question, 'Who's your daddy?'

But one day, the new preacher said the benediction so fast that he got caught and had to walk out with the crowd.

Just about the time he got to the back door, the new preacher, not knowing anything about him, put his hand on his shoulder and asked him, 'Son, who's your daddy?'

The whole church got deathly quiet. He could feel every eye in the church looking at him. Now everyone would finally know the answer to the question, 'Who's your daddy?'

'This new preacher, though, sensed the situation around him and using discernment that only the Holy Spirit could give, said the following to that scared little boy.. 'Wait a minute! I know who you are! I see the family resemblance now; You are a child of God.'

With that he patted the boy on his shoulder and said, 'Boy, you've got a great inheritance. Go and claim it.'

'With that, the boy smiled for the first time in a long time and walked out the door a changed person. He was never the same again. Whenever anybody asked him, 'Who's your Daddy?' he'd just tell them, 'I'm a Child of God.'

The distinguished gentleman got up from the table and said, 'Isn't that a great story?'
The professor responded that it really was a great story!

As the man turned to leave, he said, 'You know, if that new preacher hadn't told me that I was one of God's children, I probably never would have amounted to anything!' And he walked away.

The seminary professor and his wife were stunned. He called the waitress over & asked her, 'Do you know who that man was -- the one who just left that was sitting at our table?'

The waitress grinned and said, 'Of course. Everybody here knows him. That's Ben Hooper. He's governor of Tennessee!'

How do you identify yourself?
Do you see yourself as a child of God?

II Am Loyal to God and to Jesus?

When we say I am a man/woman of faith, I believe in God, God is important in my life... What does that mean?

What is faith?

Most of us would answer that faith is what we believe...

the Creed... our dogmas.

We recite the Creed at Sunday Mass...

at an infant's Baptism all of us recommit ourselves to our Creed.

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At the Renewal of our Baptismal Vows on Easter we recommit ourselves to what we believe. However, Faith is *not only* about what we believe, in the sense of dogmas. The term “Faith” has a long history and its meaning has changed over the course of its usage.

Faith (pistis in Greek)...

Pistis faith in Greek, became *fides* (loyalty, faithfulness) in Latin (St. Jerome’s translation)...

Pisteuo, I believe in Greek, became *credo* (St. Jerome), a word derived from *cor do*, “I give my heart.”

So “belief” *originally meant* “loyalty to a person to whom one is bound in promise or duty, to whom one gives one’s heart.”

In the early Church of the 3rd and 4th centuries, at the Easter Vigil ceremony of Baptism, the baptismal candidates were lined up outside the church facing westward, in the direction of Egypt, the realm of sunset and death. As the first step in their reenactment of the Israelites’ liberation from slavery, they renounced Satan. They were then “turned around” in a “conversion” toward the east – to the dawn, new life, and the pristine innocence of Eden. Processing into the Church, they discarded their clothes, symbolically shedding their old selves, so that they stood naked, like Adam and Eve before the fall. Each mystes was then plunged three times into the waters of the baptismal pool. This was their crossing of the Sea and their symbolic immersion in the death of Christ, whose tomb stood only a few yards away.

Each time they were pulled underwater, the bishop asked them: Do you have pistis in the Father – in the Son – in the Holy Spirit? And each time, the mystes cried, “Pisteuo”: I give my heart, my loyalty and my commitment!”

When they emerged from the pool, they had themselves become christoi (“anointed ones”). They were clothed in white garments, symbolizing their new identity, received the Eucharist for the first time, and, like Christ at his own baptism, were ritually adopted as “sons and daughters of God.”

As Theodore, bishop of Mopsuestia in Cilicia from 392-428, explained to his catechumens: When you say “pisteuo” (“I engage myself”) before God, you show that you will remain steadfastly with him, that you will never separate yourself from him and that you will think it higher than anything else to be and to live with him and to conduct yourself in a way that is in harmony with his commandments.

Our Faith is foremost our loyalty to God and Jesus... I believe – I will be loyal, since I am a special child of God... a new creation.

Have you heard the name Shabbaz Bhatti?...

Shabbaz was a Pakistani member of the Pakistan Congress, a Catholic, who was trying to repeal the Pakistani law against converting from Islam to Christianity... a law which was being used to persecute Catholics in Pakistan.

Listen to his words...

“I have been asked to put an end to my battle, but I have always refused, even at the risk of my own life. My response has always been the same. I do not want popularity, I do not want positions of power. I only want a place at the feet of Jesus. I want my life, my character, my actions to speak of me and say that I am following Jesus Christ. This desire is so strong in me that I consider myself privileged whenever--in my combative effort to help the needy, the poor, the persecuted Christians of Pakistan--Jesus should wish to accept the sacrifice of my life. I want to live for Christ and it is for Him that I want to die. I do not feel any fear in this country.”

Shabbaz was gunned down on a Pakistan street by radical Islamists on March 2, 2011...)

For us who have been baptized we see life differently.

Life is not just about being a good, entertained consumer of stuff that we think will fulfill us and make us happy.

Life is not just about work, or keeping up with the Joneses...

Life is not just about power, sex, money, reputation, security and playing golf when at last we retire.

These things are not bad, but they do not define what life is all about for us who are disciples of Jesus.

I am a child of God and I am loyal and give my heart to God and to his Son, Jesus Christ. I commit myself to that.

III Live My Faith

Now we are at the third question... How do we live out our loyalty, our faith, to God and Jesus? For us disciples of Jesus, we try to be loyal to Jesus and his teachings, his values, his ideals. Jesus is the human face of God for us...

John in his Gospel repeats time and time again that Jesus “shows us the Father.” (Cf Jn 14).

Jesus brings the dream of his loving Father for us... God’s will for us.

He also tells us that he is the vine and *we are the branches*, and he wants us to bear much fruit.

(Jn 14:1-8) What fruit?

1.) Love

First and foremost we follow his command to love...

to be people who care...

Jesus was a man for others...

His is a vision of a world in which people are more concerned with giving than with having, with sharing than with possessing, with serving than with being served; where each is valued for what he or she is rather than what they have; where the narrow loyalties of class or race or tradition or party are of less weight than the solidarity of the human race created in God’s likeness; and where in areas of conflict and violence, forgiveness and reconciliation have been proved to be powerful weapons. (Michael Mayne, **Pray, Love, Remember**, p.33)

Life is not about us... it’s about Jesus and others.

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Listen to Jesus' words:

This is the first commandment: 'Hear of Israel! The Lord our God is the Lord alone! Therefore you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength.'

*This is the second,
'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* (Mk 12:28-31)

(Listen to this beautiful instruction John gives in his first letter to his early Christian community: *Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten of God and has knowledge of God. The man without love has known nothing of God, for God is love... Love consists in this: not that we have loved God, but that he has loved us and sent his Son as an offering for our sins.... Beloved, if God has loved us so, we must have the same love for one another.* (1 Jn 4:7-11))

(Compare this with some of the people Jerry Springer has on his TV show.)

Living out our faith means living as people who care, people who are compassionate, people who learn to forgive – difficult as that might be – (See my reflections on our website...

www.stpaulofthecrossmonastery.com.)

Read the story of the Good Samaritan... who is our neighbor? Luke 10:25-35.

2.) Work World

Our Work World

A question arises?

How do we relate Jesus' teaching on love and the other teachings of Jesus such as the Sermon on the Mt or his words on riches. (read Lk 16 and Mt 6:19.) to our everyday work world where we spend or have spent so much of our time and efforts?

We might try to live Jesus' teaching in our own family life or in our relationships to neighbors and friends and folks at Church, but how do we apply his teachings to our work world?

How do we live our faith in our work world?

Over the centuries the Church, members of the community of Jesus' disciples, have had a lot of experience in dealing with our world. During the 19th and 20th centuries and into our 21st century the teaching authority of the Church has reflected long and deeply on the work world and how Jesus' teachings might apply to this world.

A good compilation of the teaching Church's reflections on the work world are presented in a book entitled **Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church**. (2009)

Let me give a story on the level of our personal relationships at work.

Story:

During my second month of college, our professor gave us a pop quiz. I was a conscientious student and had breezed through the questions until I read the last one: "What is the first name of the woman who cleans the school?"

Surely this was some kind of joke. I had seen the cleaning woman several times. She was tall, dark-haired and in her 50's. But how would I know her name? I handed in my paper, leaving the last question blank. Just before class ended, one student asked if the last question would count toward out quiz grade.

"Absolutely," said the professor. "In your careers you will meet many people. All are significant. They deserve your attention and care, even if all you do is smile and say "hello".

I've never forgotten that lesson. I also learned that the cleaning lady's first name was Dorothy.

How do we treat others at work?

Question: Why does God have you at your job right now?

Once my niece asked me what God wanted her to do... she had two small children at the time and worked in an office. Was there anything more God wanted her to do? I simply said that I thought God wanted her to be a good wife, a good mother and a good worker. She said she tries to do this. At work there is plenty of stress. She tries to bring some humaneness and care to her work, respect and kindness – a challenge at times... I told her I think that was what God wanted her to do.

Do you act like a child of God and brother/sister of Jesus on your job?

How do you treat people at work?

What about toxic people at work? How do we treat them... total avoidance, mean toward them, talking about them behind their backs?

I sometimes suggest you treat them with respect – you don't have to be their best friend and you are not their therapist or their savior. However, you can pray for them... just ask God to love them and bless them... no more specific than that.

In an article in America Magazine, May 21, 2012, entitled "The Ethical Executive", the author, Michael Naughton, summarizes a position paper presented to 2000 business leaders at the International Christian Union of Business Executives World Congress in Lyon, France in March of 2012. Michael Naughton helped draft this position paper tries to apply the heart of Pope Benedict's Encyclical Caritas in Veritate(2009) to the business world.

At the heart of the document is the conviction that business executives are called not just to do business, but to be a particular kind of leader in business.... Human work and in particular the work of business leaders is not a second-rate vocation, but as "Vocation" is a genuine human and Christian calling from God. It's not just "don't steal, don't cheat," but a vocation that makes an irreplaceable contribution to material and even the spiritual well-being of humankind. The Christian business executive lives his faith even in his work environment.

The document then spells out some practical principles of such a conviction.

(For a full text of this document and other links see www.bit.ly/businessleadervocation)

Of course, if you're retired the question is... now what does God want you to do?

Recently I was talking in front of our Monastery Church with a retired couple. They mentioned that the next day he drives for Meals on Wheels and his wife drives for Meals on Wheels the following. Now that's what a child of God would do – be of service to others. But certainly, enjoy your retirement too! Enjoy your leisure. Enjoy friendships and family. That's what God wants you to do... that's bearing fruit that will last.

And what about mentoring? Older people of faith can encourage and affirm younger adults and especially their grand kids, nieces and nephews. I often see older adults taking their grandchildren to our 10 AM Sunday Mass at our Monastery Church... what a wonderful way to put our Faith into action.

Conclusion

Back to our three basic questions...

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Who am I? Whose am I? A child of God and disciple of Jesus.

What is Faith? My loyalty to God and to Jesus and Jesus' vision and values and way of living.

How do I live out my Faith... Only you can answer that?

Make a decision now... make a resolution now of one thing you can do to live out your faith when you return home from this retreat.