



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 1st May 2024

[Multimedia]

The following text includes parts that were not read out loud, but should be considered as such.

Cycle of Catechesis. Vices and Virtues. 17. *Faith*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today I would like to talk about the virtue of *faith*. Together with charity and hope, this virtue is described as *theological*. There are three theological virtues: faith, hope and charity. Why are they theological? Because they can be lived out only thanks to the gift of God. The three theological virtues are the great gifts that God gives to our moral capacity. Without them, we could be prudent, just, strong and temperate, but we would not have eyes that see even in the dark, we would not have a heart that loves even when it is not loved, we would not have a hope that dares against all hope.

What is faith? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that faith is the act by which the human being freely commits himself to God (n. 1814). In this faith, Abraham was the great father. When he agreed to leave the land of his ancestors to head for the land that God would show him, he would probably have been judged insane: why leave the known for the unknown, the certain for the uncertain? But why do this? Is he insane? But Abraham sets off, as if he could see the

invisible. This is what the Bible says about Abraham: “He went out, not knowing where he was to go”. This is beautiful. And it will again be the invisible that makes him go up the mountain with his son Isaac, the only son of the promise, who only at the last moment will be spared from sacrifice. In this faith, Abraham becomes the father of a long line of descendants. Faith made him fruitful.

A man of faith would be Moses. Welcoming God’s voice even when more than one doubt could have shaken him, he continued to stand firm and to trust in the Lord, and even to defend the people who were so often lacking in faith.

A woman of faith would be the Virgin Mary. Receiving the annunciation of the Angel, which many would have dismissed as too demanding and risky, she answered, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (*Lk 1:38*). And, with her heart full of faith, with her heart full of trust in God, Mary set out on a path of which she knew neither the route nor the dangers.

Faith is the virtue that makes the Christian. Because to be Christians is not first and foremost about accepting a culture, with the values that accompany it, but being Christian means welcoming and cherishing a bond, a bond with God: God and I, myself and the amiable face of Jesus. This bond is what makes us Christians.

Speaking of faith, an episode from the Gospel comes to mind. Jesus’ disciples are crossing the lake, and they are surprised by the storm. They think they can get by with the strength of their arms, with the resources of their experience, but the boat starts to fill up with water and they are seized by panic (cf. *Mk 4:35-41*). They do not realize that they have the solution before their very eyes: Jesus is there with them on the boat, in the midst of the storm, and Jesus is asleep, says the Gospel. When they finally awaken him, fearful and even angry that he would let them die, Jesus rebukes them: “Why are you afraid? *Have you no faith?*” (*Mk 4:40*).

Here, then, is the great enemy of faith: it is not intelligence, nor is it reason, as, alas, some continue obsessively to repeat; but the great enemy of faith is fear. For this reason, faith is the first gift to welcome in the Christian life: a gift that must be welcomed and asked for daily, so that it may be renewed in us. It is seemingly a small gift, yet it is the essential one. When we were brought to the baptismal font, our parents, after announcing the name they had chosen for us, were asked by the priest — this happened at our Baptism — “What do you ask of God’s Church?” And the parents answered: “Faith, baptism!”.

For Christian parents, aware of the grace that was granted to them, that is the gift to ask for their child: faith. With it, parents know that, even in the midst of life’s trials, their child will not drown in fear. See, the enemy is fear. They also know that, when the child ceases to have a parent on this earth, he will continue to have a God the Father in heaven, who will never abandon him. Our love is so fragile, and only God’s love conquers death.

Certainly, as the Apostle says, not all have faith (cf. *2 Thess 3:2*), and we too, who are believers, often realize that we have only a short supply. Often Jesus can rebuke us, as he did with his disciples, for being “men of little faith”. But it is the happiest gift, the only virtue we are permitted to envy. Because those who have faith have a force within them that is beyond merely human; indeed, faith “triggers” grace in us and opens the mind to the mystery of God. As Jesus once said, “If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this sycamine tree, ‘Be rooted up, and be planted in the sea’, and it would obey you” (*Lk 17:6*). Therefore, let us too, like the disciples, repeat to him: Lord, “increase our faith!” (*Lk 17:5*). It is a beautiful prayer! Shall we say it all together? “Lord, increase our faith”. Let us say it together: [everyone] “Lord, increase our faith”. Too quiet... a bit louder: [everyone] “Lord, increase our faith!”. Thank you.

Special Greetings

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially the groups from Finland, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Uganda, India, Malaysia, Canada and the United States of America. I also wish to express to the people of Kenya my spiritual closeness at this time as severe flooding has tragically taken the lives of many of our brothers and sisters, injured others and caused widespread destruction. I invite you to pray for all those affected by this natural disaster. Even amidst adversity, we remember the joy of the risen Christ, and I invoke upon you and your families the loving mercy of God our Father. May the Lord bless you!

Lastly, my thoughts go out to *young people*, to *the sick*, to *the elderly* and to *newlyweds*. Today, 1 May, with the entire Church, we remember Saint Joseph the Worker, and we begin the Marian month. Therefore, I would like to propose to each of you the Holy Family of Nazareth as an example of a domestic community: a community of life, work and love.

And then let us not forget to pray for peace. Let us pray for people who are victims of war. War is always a defeat — always. Let us think of tormented Ukraine which is suffering so much. Let us think of those who live in Palestine and in Israel, who are at war. Let us think of the Rohingya, of Myanmar, and let us ask for peace. Let us ask for true peace for these people and for the whole world. Sadly, today, investments in arms manufacturing are those which yield the most income. Terrible, profiting from death. Let us ask for peace, may peace advance.

I give my blessing to all!

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters: In our continuing catechesis on the theological virtues, which unite us to God and strengthen the moral virtues, we now turn to faith. The Catechism states that by faith we believe in God and all that God has revealed to us, and freely commit our entire self to him (cf. No. 1814). Throughout the Scriptures, we encounter poignant examples of this manifested in the lives of such individuals as Abraham, Moses and the Blessed Virgin Mary, who embarked on uncharted paths fraught with perils entrusting themselves completely to God. Yet even among believers, there are times when faith can falter and fear takes hold. Let us remember that faith is a gift, a gift that must be asked for with confidence in the power of God's grace to give stability and strength to our lives. Like the disciples in the boat, buffeted by the storm on the lake, let us turn to Jesus each day and beg him: "Lord, increase our faith!" (*Lk 17:5*)