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THE CATHOLIC FAITH

"I know Whom I have believed." (2 Tim. i. 12.)

Christ's Stress on Faith

BY word and deed, our Lord Jesus Christ laid heavy stress upon the virtue of faith. He praised it repeatedly; affirmed its blessedness; ascribed to it wonderful efficacy; required it of those who asked His help; rewarded it here with striking manifestations of goodness and power; and promised to reward it hereafter with everlasting life. Even more vividly does His treatment of unbelief in its various forms and degrees bring out the supreme importance He attached to this virtue. When His disciples faltered or fell short in faith, He reproved them; when His countrymen refused to believe, He would not—the Gospels go so far as to say He could not—work many miracles among them; when different cities and towns which had been given ample proof of His right to allegiance rejected Him, He denounced and threatened them, calmly, patiently, sorrowfully, yet sternly and with terrific earnestness.

The Way, The Truth, The Life

Our Lord does not demand faith merely from those whom He met face to face. The care He took to instruct a few chosen disciples thoroughly; the commission He gave them of preaching the Gospel to every creature (Mark xvi. 15); the tremendous authority with which He clothed them

(John xx. 21); the decisive way in which He identified them with Himself (Luke x. 16); the solemn promise He made to be with them all days even to the consummation of the world (Matthew xxviii. 20); the awful threats He leveled against those who would not hear nor receive them (Matthew x. 15); the splendid promises He made to those who through their word should believe in Him (Mark xvi. 16-18); all these things show beyond question that He fully intended to set Himself before the whole world as the Way, the Truth, and the Life; the Way by which alone men may reach their goal; the Truth which alone can set them free; the Life without which they shall be swallowed up by everlasting death. This is the light in which He has always stood before mankind. Thus He asks to be received today. Distance has not diminished, the lapse of time has not lessened His demands. We of the twentieth century, like the men of the first, are called to stand with or against Him; to accept or to reject Him. Faith, for us as for them, is an imperative duty. What, then, is Faith? What does it mean to believe in Christ?

Many examples of faith are set before us in the Gospels. There is the centurion who begged our Lord to speak but a word and his servant would be healed (Luke vii. 7); the woman of Canaan who asked for her daughter's cure on the ground that even the whelps eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table (Matthew xv. 27); the woman who touched but the hem of Christ's garment and was freed from her infirmity (Mark v. 25); Peter with his glorious confession of Christ's knowledge and truthfulness: "Lord to whom shall we go, Thou hast the words of eternal life?" (John vi. 69.)

The Heart of Faith

On studying these and other instances of faith we find that they have one trait in common—they all manifest a firm, ready, and unreserved trust in Christ. Beneath that feeling of confidence there lies—as the foundation on which it rests, as the root from which it springs, as its only justification—the thorough-going conviction that Christ is full of grace and truth; that He is able and willing to help those who call upon Him; that He is worthy of being trusted in all the affairs of life, in the face of every trial and difficulty, without hesitation or reserve, in every fiber of one's being, with all the strength and fidelity of one's soul. That conviction is the very heart of Faith.

When it enters deep into a man he goes forth to seek Christ wherever He may be found, in whatever relationship He may be pleased to assume toward mankind, and when he finds Him, he will not let Him go. He clings to Him more closely than a trustful child to his father. Nothing can separate him from the love of Christ.

How wide and deep an influence this steadfast allegiance exerts upon a man's life, what sweetness and strength it pours abroad in the soul, can be fully known only by one who has yielded himself up to it without reserve. Experience alone can give that knowledge.

Still, reason can see whither faith leads, what sway it seeks, what results it ought to produce. It will be well for us, therefore, to study the meaning of faith in detail. A better knowledge of its nature should help and move us to give it full, free play in our future lives.

Christ a Teacher

Our Lord Jesus Christ comes before us primarily as a Teacher of religious truth. He makes His Father known to us; tells us how great a love God bears the world; how carefully He watches over the things that He has made; how readily He listens to prayer; how kind, patient, merciful He is to all who seek Him; how generous in rewarding the good, how inexorable in punishing the wicked.

Christ makes Himself known to us as the Only Begotten Son Who is One with the Father, and, therefore, true God; He sets Himself up as the One Who alone can save His people from their sins, and as the One Who will judge the living and the dead. Many other truths does He make known to us; about our souls: their superiority to the body together with their weakness, their need of help no less than their immortality; about the world: its deceitfulness, its vanity and fleeting character; about the blessedness of virtue and the misery of vice; about what lies beyond the grave: stern judgment, a happy heaven and a wretched hell. All these and many more truths has Jesus Christ taught the world, both in person and by His chosen ambassadors.

Shall We Believe?

What are we to think of them? Shall we accept them all without question, on His authority? Or shall we examine what He says in the light of our own experience and wisdom—softening, changing, rejecting, as incapable of proof, or contrary to reason, or disproved by facts, much that He undoubtedly preached as the truth? Shall we be governed by His principles of right and wrong? or shall we

revise His commandments to meet modern conditions, discarding many of them as useless, out-of-date, and tyrannical?

To the man of faith it is a strange thing that questions like these should be asked, and stranger still—a sorrowful mystery—that any man who calls himself a Christian should even hesitate how to answer them. He himself is solicitous about one thing only, to know when Christ speaks, through whom, and what He says. When rival teachers, all claiming to preach the Gospel of Christ, come before him, he asks for their credentials; questions them closely about their right to speak in that holy Name; weighs their answers carefully; gets hold of all the facts that have a bearing on the truth and justice of their claims; sets aside prejudice, pride, passion, self-interest, with every other disturbing influence; and decides the dispute between them, according to the evidence, by the light of reason and by whatever rays of revelation may have fallen on his mind. When that work has been well and faithfully done, his uncertainty and difficulties are at an end. He pays no further heed to false teachers, but turns with the open mind and docile spirit of a little child to those whom Christ has commissioned to preach the Gospel. When they speak, he listens eagerly, catching every word, treasuring them all in his heart, pondering over them within himself, believing them with all the strength of his mind.

Peace Through Compromise

Some men would dissuade him from believing, or at any rate from holding tenaciously, all that he is taught. They have agreed among themselves to divide the truths

of revelation into two classes: the essential or fundamental on one hand, the non-essential or non-fundamental on the other. One notices that they are inclined to differ a little as to the side on which certain doctrines should be put. This difference of opinion, however, rarely lasts long or grows to serious proportions. It would be altogether out of keeping with the professed purpose and character of these men to fall out over a trifle of that sort, so it usually comes to pass, in the long run, that a doctrine is reckoned non-essential whenever it is strongly opposed by any prominent group of so-called Christian thinkers, however vital it may appear to other men. God, they say, surely does not care about these points of doctrine. Christ may, indeed, have preached them; but if He did, they were only an after-thought with Him. God will not insist on them. Peace, goodwill, fair-play, honesty, these and like virtues are what He desires and demands above all else. The matters about which Christians dispute, over which they have quarreled and shed blood, have done the world more harm than good. Away with them, then, in the name of the God of peace!

The men who talk thus want to find a common standing-place for the dissenting sects of Christendom. They want to close the wide gaps between the various professed followers of Jesus Christ. They have hit upon what seems to them a splendid and effective scheme for securing unity. They are astonished and hurt that others do not think so well of it. Sometimes they take it ill that others refuse to join in that plan of repair and defense. They charge these men with keeping the breach in Christendom wide open, thereby enabling the enemy to make rapid headway, to the ruin of souls, and to the overthrow of Christ's kingdom.

Blind Leaders . . . Worldly Banners

What incredible blindness! What fatal folly! They want to rally the scattered sheep of Jesus Christ. Under whom? Around what banners? Under leaders who forget that Jesus Christ came not to send peace, but the sword (Matthew x. 34); who have not heard or will not heed the command: "Fight the good fight of faith" (I Tim. vi. 12); leaders who do not know that it is their strict duty to keep what has been committed to their trust; leaders who are willing to give up their birthright for a mess of pottage, the eternal truth of God for a brief peace with men; leaders who are as trumpets that give forth an uncertain sound; who are themselves blind and fall with their followers into the pit; leaders who prove themselves hirelings by fleeing when the wolf of unbelief cometh. Around the banners of worldly wisdom—banners with high-sounding attractive titles—titles that are but a sham and a snare. One is called progress. Its real name is surrender, for it points the way back to the crude errors from which Christ has set us free. Another is called enlightenment; in reality it is ignorance that knows not the value of truth, nor how to distinguish it from error. Another is called freedom; in reality it is pride that tells Christ His sayings are hard (John vi. 61); it is self-will which goes its own way despite the command: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye Him" (2 Peter i. 17). Another is called charity; in reality it is treason, which gives up the truth and law of Christ rather than lose the good-will and praises of the world.

Christian Leadership

Why not rally the scattered sheep under leaders who realize that Christ is set up as a sign which shall be contradicted (Luke ii. 34); who are quick to hear and prompt to heed the call to battle? leaders who know that they must keep the Faith? leaders who will not give up one jot or tittle of Divine Truth for all the world? leaders who teach not as the Scribes and Pharisees (Matthew vii. 29), but speak and exhort and rebuke with all authority (Titus ii. 15), who see and walk in the light? leaders who are willing to lay down their lives for the sheep?

Christian Standards

Why not bid the flock gather around the banners of heavenly wisdom? the banner of courage that smiles at threats and blows for the sake of truth? the banner of knowledge that sells all it has to buy the pearl of great price (Matthew xiii. 46)? the banner of humility that comes like a little child to enter the kingdom of heaven? the banner of obedience that does promptly, fully and joyfully, the will of our Heavenly Father? the banner of fidelity which holds fast the traditions it has learned? In a word, why not rally the scattered sheep around Jesus Christ Himself? Why not call them back beneath the banners of the truth? Why not bid those who say they believe in Him to listen to His voice? Surely He can make Himself heard amid the din of conflict. Why not urge them to hold fast His every word? Surely He has not spoken any one of them idly. Why not bid and persuade them to turn from false teachers back to those whom Christ commissioned to go forth and preach the

Gospel to every creature (Mark xvi. 15), to whom He said: "He that heareth you, heareth Me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me" (Luke x. 16); upon whom He sent the Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth, to abide with them forever (John xiv. 16); whom He Himself guides and sustains at all times in accordance with His promise: "I will be with you all days even to the consummation of the world." (Matthew xxviii. 20.) What is it but cowardice, or downright treachery, to suggest retreat, to counsel compromise, to advise surrender?

Loyalty to Christ

Whatever others may think, however they may act, the man of faith, the man who really believes in Christ will not think himself at liberty to give up one jot or tittle of the truth which God has spoken to men, whether by the Prophets of old or by the lips of Jesus Christ. He values every word of revelation as a priceless treasure. He is determined to keep that which has been committed to his trust, to hold fast the traditions he has learned, to seal his faith, if need be, as the martyrs sealed it, with his life-blood. He knows that God does care what we believe: that He is not willing to have His word treated with indifference or rejected as useless. The fact that God has spoken plainly is, to a clear-minded man, sufficient proof that He wants men to listen to His words with respect, and to believe them without question. Were other proof needed one might find it abundantly in the Scriptural denunciations of those who are faint-hearted and believe not God, and in the inspired promises made to those who hear the word of God and keep it.

Peace with Fidelity

The man of faith is deeply grieved by the wretched strife that has delayed so long the victory of Christ. He will gladly do all that he can to bring about peace. But it must be a peace without dishonor; a peace gained without the sacrifice of principle or of Truth. There is only one peace for which he cares, only one for which he will spend himself: the peace that comes in the train of the conquering Christ, the peace that shall be complete, unbroken, and unending only when the Lord's enemies have been made His footstool.

The Firm Ground of Faith

While reflecting on the teachings of faith, the believer is often struck by their harmony with the findings of reason and with the facts of experience. He gains thereby a new reason for confidence in his teachers, a further proof that he is not following blind guides. He does not, however, change the ground of his belief; he does not begin to rest his acceptance of those truths on his intellectual ability to back them up with convincing proofs. He does not begin to build upon himself rather than on God. He continues as he began. To the very end, at all times, under all conditions, he holds fast what he has been taught, simply and solely because it is the Word of God.

Humility the Solvent of Difficulties

It may happen, however, that he finds in revelation many things that he can hardly fit together or square with his

other knowledge. There may be in it trying and painful, as well as unfathomable, mysteries. He does not therefore deny, or doubt, or hesitate to believe. That difficulty does not even threaten his faith. He knows that the powers of his mind are very limited. From earliest infancy that has been steadily borne in upon him with irresistible force. He cannot look with inquiring mind at a flower underfoot, or a star overhead, without realizing that he does not understand how the one draws its fragrant breath or the other holds its place in the sky. There is not one thing, big or little, far or near, in all the vast universe that he or any other man fully understands. This truth he keeps always before him. It begets lowliness of mind. He, therefore, judges it arrogant folly to make one's own intellect the measure of truth. When men tell him that they will not believe what they cannot understand, even though the message be delivered by one who offers convincing proof that he speaks for God and with Divine approval, he is indignant with them for their insolence towards God, and he pities them because they thereby shut their souls to the true Light, without which they will walk in eternal darkness.

Science and Religion

Their frequent, confident, scornful assertions that Science and Religion, Reason and Faith, are irreconcilably opposed, do not disturb him. He has no fear that any of them will have to be given up. It may be that he has looked into some instances of the alleged conflict. In that case he has found one blunder or another at the root of every difficulty. Sometimes the teachings of Religion have been gravely

misunderstood. Sometimes they have been overstated, not by those who alone have a right to speak authoritatively and with finality in matters of faith, but by men who have gone beyond their commission, or by self-appointed teachers who speak for themselves alone, and are alone responsible for their errors. There may be, there have been, clashes between these misunderstandings or misstatements of revelation on the one hand, and solidly-established, as well as accurately-stated, scientific truths on the other. That does not concern the believer's faith. There is in those clashes no question of a conflict between Religion and Science.

At other times, reckless camp-followers of science, unmindful of their own marked limitations, temporarily, at least, forgetful of the laws of reason, burning it may be, for a noisy but cheap and transient fame, fly furiously in the face of Religion. There is noise, dust, smoke, and then, after a little while, it is found that the weapons forged to destroy the teachings of faith have bent back upon the hands that held them, or have been shattered upon the shield of reason. Real scientists, well-balanced, painstaking men, sweep the fragments into the gloom of oblivion, while, unharmed, Religion looks calmly down on the deserted battlefield, and her children stand serenely around her, secure in their faith.

Upholding Religion's Fair Fame

"It is not often," you may say, "that believers sift the charges against Religion and thus vindicate her honor." To secure their own peace of mind, there is no need that they should. If they have genuine faith they do not enter into these studies for their own sake, to deepen their own sense

of security, but only to clear Religion in the eyes of other honest men from insulting and unjust charges, or to help those who walk by Reason alone; whose souls see but dimly, or not at all, the Light that shines from heaven.

Knowing Whom They Have Believed

For themselves they have another and surer ground of certainty. They know Whom they have believed—that nothing in heaven or on earth lies hid from His eyes, that He cannot mislead or deceive. In Him they trust; what though men, who hold high places in the intellectual world, call on them in the words of human wisdom to reject faith as folly; what though coarser minds try to laugh them out of their stronghold. The world tries every device; appeals to every appetite; alternately coaxes and drives, appeals and threatens, bribes and robs. Despite it all true believers stand fast in the Faith (1 Cor. xvi. 13); “they continue in the Faith, grounded and settled, and immovable from the hope of the Gospel.” That Gospel is more to them than all human learning; more than life or death—for heaven and earth shall pass away but His words shall not pass away.

