

Faith—Theological Virtue—Gift from God

In general faith is accepting and firmly believing something which reason cannot prove. The belief is firm enough for us to take action based on the unproven factor. We live as if it were true. An example of this is the faith we place in the prescriptions, medicines or actions, that medical doctors give us when we first approach them about a malady. Typically we do not have personal knowledge that the prescribed pill will cure us, and we have to decide either to buy and take the medication or to look elsewhere for a cure. When we choose to believe, without proof, that the prescribed medicine will return us to health, we take the medicine. We choose to act based on faith in the doctor and the prescribed medicine.

A step beyond faith in general is the virtue of faith, that is, the habitual acceptance of what reason cannot prove. After multiple actions taken on individual choices where the firmly held but non-provable factor would be a consideration, we do not need to refer to or re-confirm our belief in the factor; we have formed the habit of always acting as if it were true. We have assented to belief in the non-provable factor and do not reexamine it at each instance. For example, as we take multiple problems over time to our doctors and find that their prescribed medications or actions have brought us back to health, we tend not to question each prescription. Rather, we simply accept the prescription and act on it. There is no conscious decision to place faith in the doctor for that specific incident.

The theological virtue of faith is a habit of belief about a particular non-provable reality, the existence of God and his attributes. There may be rational arguments for God's existence but no physical proof. The acceptance of the existence of this physically non-provable being is one of the gifts from that Divine Being to us human beings, to me. It is something we/I did not earn and cannot merit and can only assent to or reject.

Affecting my daily life is my habitual, although imperfectly so, acceptance of these beliefs as facts: (a) there is an all-powerful God who created the universe and all that exists including me, (b) this being loves all his creation globally and me individually, (c) God incarnated himself into this world as Jesus Christ, (d) living as a human being Jesus taught us how to love God, and (e) in becoming human and allowing his own death as a human Jesus opened the way to our having eternal life with his divine being.

In the Catholic tradition there are several statements of the faith we profess with regularity, the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed. These are recited so frequently from memory that I find it takes effort to pay attention to the meaning of the recited words. In fact, I have experienced times when I consciously tried to recall the next phrase and its meaning and found that not only could I not, but I lost the subconscious flow of reciting the creed. I had to stop, listen to others, and let my subconscious get back in the flow of the words.

In reflecting on this virtue and writing about it, I've come to the conclusion that I ought occasionally to use the *lectio divina* method with these two statements of our faith. Read them slowly with thoughtful, meditative consideration for the meaning of each word and each phrase.

Another activity toward understanding the Faith that we receive from God would be to read with thoughtful consideration the most recent statement of faith proclaimed by the papacy, *The Credo the People of God* proclaimed by Pope Paul VI in 1968. It can be found at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-vi_motu-proprio_19680630_credito_en.html .

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1. What particular elements of your faith affect your daily life?
2. Why do they have particular meaning to you?
3. How do these beliefs affect you as you go about your daily activities?
4. What would happen in your life if you consciously gave these beliefs greater presence in your daily life—consciously allowed them to impact the choices you make each day?
5. What first step are you willing to take this week?