

Homily  
19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
8/11/19

Faith, hope and love: these three virtues are known as the theological virtues when we talk about religion. Faith, hope and love. Faith, as we hear in our second reading, today is “the realization of what is hoped for, evidence of things not seen.” But what does it exactly say that faith is? Many times we struggle with faith because we don’t quite know what faith is, and if we don’t truly believe in everything that’s there, do we really have faith?

Many times we struggle with faith because we don’t understand completely. Now faith is given to us by God to have faith in Him. And you may ask, how did you use the word in its own definition? Because I did!! When it comes to faith, it is seeking understanding. We are called to always be in search of understanding Who God is, why God is, and what that means for us.

The second theological virtue is hope: hope is in everything to come. Hope is in eternal life. Hope is in seeing God face-to-face when we die. And Love is the realization of the presence of God. So as we cross over into the next life, we will no longer need faith, we will have no need of hope because we will be in Love.

We have in faith in God and everything that He tells us, but many times when we struggle with some of the teachings of the Church, we think that we are being unfaithful. Is there anyone in this church today, who understands completely all that the Church teaches? We all struggle with things that the Church teaches, but we’re all called as St. Anselm tells us, to continue to seek understanding in those things that we don’t understand that we may believe what the Church teaches.

The teaching authority of the church is the Magisterium, and they don’t just come up with these understandings willy-nilly. No, it takes a long time for teachings in the Church to come out. Sometimes we get frustrated with that. Why is it taking so long for the Church to say this or that? Because we want to make sure that what we’re saying has truth in it. We want to make sure that what we’re saying is coming from the basics of Who God is.

And in the Gospels, Jesus, when He talks to the apostles and when people come to Him and say, what does it mean to be a person of faith? What are the rules I have to follow? He brings us to two: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength. Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Every rule, every law, every teaching that comes from the church is based on those two teachings. You may look at yourself and say wait a minute, every teaching? Yes, every single teaching that the Church has, comes from God, His love. What does that mean for us and how do we carry that out? All the rules in canon law, everything that’s in the Catechism touches on how we embrace God’s love, and how do we live it out best?

So we’re always being called to seek the deeper understanding of faith, because if we can’t grasp a little bit and realize that we can’t grasp everything, many times that’s why we see people leaving the church. Well I can’t understand this teaching, therefore I’m not a good

enough Catholic, I'm not a good enough Christian, and God doesn't love me anyways. Wait – how did you make that leap? Many times we do though, right?

The reality though, my brothers and sisters, is that we're called to have faith, not a blind faith, as many non Catholics say: have a blind faith in God. Gotta have a blind faith in the Church because they really don't understand the teachings but the Church says, and they must then obey. Not exactly. The Church teaches based on the love of God.

The problem though is the ultimate show of faith for us as Catholics is the Mass. Because if we don't have faith in the most basic teaching: "Do this in remembrance of Me." then we're going to struggle with everything else. Sometimes teachings are too difficult for us to understand, but it was too difficult for the disciples too. Remember, when Jesus said, "My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink." What was the next line after that? "Some of His disciples left because His teaching was too hard to understand.

But we as Catholics today teach and are called to believe that the climax, the epitome of our faith, the source and summit of who we are, is the Eucharist. The Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ. There was a study that came out this last week, that on average, one third of Catholics believe in the Real presence. One third. Which means two thirds, on average, don't believe that Christ is present in the Eucharist, that Christ is present in the Blessed Sacrament. If we can't have that basic teaching, that Jesus told us, this is what's going on, it's no mystery that we are in the world we're in today.

If we can't believe the words of Christ, it's hard for us to believe in the words of the Church which Christ instituted. But if the bread and wine truly become the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ, through the prayer of transubstantiation, at the moment of the Mass called the epiclesis, that should mean something for us besides just "Amen."

What does the word Amen mean? I believe. I assent that this is the Body of Christ. I assent to and I believe in this being the Blood of Christ. For us as Americans these days we've lost some of that sense of sacredness when it comes to the Eucharist. I was preaching last night and it was almost like preaching to the choir because one of the amazing that I've seen in the Hispanic church is that the majority of the people don't go to Communion. I looked at that the first couple times and said "Guys you know it's communion time. Get up. Get in line, and go to Communion.

That's what we're supposed to do, right? Check off that box. I received Communion today, I went to Mass today, I'm not going to hell today, Lord. That's kind of how we feel. At least that's how I felt growing up. But then I realized that not every moment of every day, should I receive the Eucharist. If I haven't gone to confession and I've got mortal sin on my soul, I should not receive the Eucharist. If I have broken the fast, I should not receive the Eucharist. Which means eating anything within an hour before Communion (that's the minimum) If I break that fast we are not supposed to receive Communion. Why? Because we're supposed to sacrifice. To receive Our Lord with a sacrificial and longing heart. "Oh, but Father, that's so hard!" It's so hard when we've got Mass at 9 in the morning to not break that fast before that.

You realize that the word breakfast comes from "Breaking the fast," right? The whole reason that the fast has changed in the last fifty years, is because the fast was too hard. For us

to go the Mass at 7, 8, 9, 10 in the morning and not eat something beforehand. It used to be that you would not have anything to eat from the time that you went to bed until Mass. And the first thing that you would receive would be the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ. And then you'd go out and have this great brunch afterwards. But now we've gotten lazy with our teaching. We don't teach these things anymore because it's difficult.

When something is difficult do we really have to do it anymore? With the internet, with all of this technology that we have today, we want to find the most efficient, most untaxing way to do things, easiest way to do things. Because we want life to be easy.

But that's not what Jesus told us. No, He said, "Pick up your cross and follow Me." But sometimes with the teachings of the church, they are hard teachings. Sometimes the teachings are too difficult for us and so we leave the Church for a time. But God is **always** calling us back, **always**. Once we've finally put ourselves by the wayside, once we've finally said, "Yes, Lord, You are Who you say You are. And I've failed." And we take responsibility for our part of that breaking of that relationship between God and us, then we can begin that journey again. Then we can seek to understand Who God is, and why that really matters.

If we can't look at the Eucharist and see the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ, it's difficult for us then to understand any of the other teachings of the Church, because they all flow from Christ. I have to admit, one of my favorite musicians I got to meet a few years ago, his name is Matt Mar. He's on Catholic radio, and he's on a lot of Protestant radio stations. He's amazing. And I got to have a conversation with him. The most intimate conversation I've ever had I had with him. It was at Mass up in Tulsa, at a Discipleship Catholic Youth Conference, and I got to say, "The Body of Christ." And he responded, "Amen."

I told my siblings that and they said, you're kinda crazy right now. That's not a conversation. But if we truly believe that the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ is in the species of the Eucharist, and that I as a priest, was able to facilitate the changing of the bread and wine into the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ, and if I was able to give that to someone whom I look up to, someone whose music has changed my life, who accepted God as I presented Him to him? What more deep conversation can you have then?

People look at that and say, well Father's gone a little crazy. I don't understand how this bread and wine can become the Eucharist. You know what? I struggle with that teaching! I don't know how that happens except that it does. So I'm then called as a priest, as a son of God, to continue to seek understanding as to how it happens. It's done through a process called "transubstantiation" which means the substance is changed, how? I don't know. Why? I don't know. Well because God tells me this happens. And I believe that God does never ever leads me astray. I then believe that the bread and wine become the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ.

But I'm always going to try to seek more understanding, because I'm one of those guys that for every question answered I get 4 or 5 more questions. My theology teachers *hated* me. My philosophy teachers *hated* me. It got to the point where I had to write down my questions in the margins, cause they'd limit me to three questions per class. Danny you've got too many questions, we have to get on with the lesson. But I have more questions! Write them down and

ask me after class. The after class meeting with my professors lasted twice as long as the actual class lasted! Why, because I'm one of those people that for me to believe I have to understand fully.

Problem is, when it comes to God, like Augustine said, we have small brains, we cannot truly understand the totality of God as God. So I finally had to come to the point where I said, "Okay, God, You win. I'm not going to know everything about You in this life or in the life to come", BUT that doesn't mean I'm going to stop searching, seeking to try and understand a little bit more, both so I can understand but also so that I can help those you have entrusted me with as pastor. To try and help them understand a little bit more too.

That's our relationship. We ask questions together, and we help each other find the answers. As the pastor I am the leader and the guide but that doesn't mean that it's not a case of the blind leading the blind sometimes. Because I don't have the answers for everything. I apologize for that, I'm frustrated by that, there's nothing I can do about that. So, God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things that I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

That third part is many times the most difficult part of that prayer. God, grant me the wisdom to know the difference between the things that I can and cannot change. So once we truly understand what that means, it gives us the opportunity to take all of the stress and leave it by the wayside. Because there's a lot of things that happen day in and day out that drive me crazy, that I can't do anything about. I can choose to either be anxious over it, or I can just let go and let God. By allowing God to be God and me to not be God, life is much easier to live.

If I got to the Lord the same way that our children do, in innocence, seeking a warm embrace through the love of God, without any preconceived notions of who He is, it's a whole lot easier to be a child of God. But it's difficult when we want to understand completely who God is. Remember though, faith is the realization of what is hoped for, and what do we hope for? Life with God. Eternity with God. And it is evidence of things not seen. How do you prove something that you can't see? It's difficult. But that doesn't mean it can't be proven. That doesn't mean it doesn't exist. That doesn't mean we can't have faith.

When we come to the liturgy, we are being called to raise our gaze and to seek something that we can never truly understand. Because God is God and I am not. Because the Lord never leaves us but always encourages us and draws us deeper into relationship if we allow Him to. So that when we come to receive the Eucharist, we do so worthily. And if we're not in that state of grace, if we haven't been to confession for a while, if we accidentally had coffee before Mass or milk before Mass, or whatever we had before Mass, we come up and we say, you know, I'm not in the state to receive Christ today, but let me receive a blessing and a prayer, that I may be ready next time.

It's not that God doesn't want to be with us, because He does, but many times that's a responsibility that He's tacked upon us. God wants to give Himself to us every moment of every day, but sometimes, we aren't prepared to receive Him. We're like those people who are have not quite had enough oil in their lamps to receive the bridegroom. But if we have not prepared

this place in our hearts, prepared this place in our lives to receive the Lord, we are called to wait. called to wait on the Lord.

My personal pet peeve, if you chew gum during Mass, don't receive the Eucharist. Please. Because gum is just like receiving some sort of food, but if you chew gum during Mass, A. **Don't.** and B. if you do, come up and ask for a blessing. God want to bless you whether you receive Him Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ, or whether you receive His blessing it's still a gift from God that can then propel us into the world this week.

As we leave this place, reality strikes us again. the ease of just sitting and participating is gone. We have to then be active in conscious and intentional, though we should be doing that as Mass too. But when we leave through these doors, many times that's when we become conscious again. Oh, the bills have to be paid, we have to go buy groceries, do the laundry, got to fold the laundry. All the tasks we have to do as we go back to the world, if we have the Lord in our heart there is no task no obstacle that is too big. For the Lord our God tells us that He loves us and will never leave us and will never abandon us.

So let us be people of faith, of hope, and of love let us be the body of Christ coming together to truly lift each other up. And if we don't truly understand something, ask the questions, and even if you don't get a sufficient answer, keep searching. Until our hearts are full because the Lord will always give us what we need.