

FAITH – Part 1

~ Does Christ Live in Me? ~

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1 Responding to Our Vocation through Genuine Faith

Since Kyoto Diocese designated 2009 as, “The First Year of Promoting Vocation”, we have spent two years thinking about ‘vocation’, and praying together about the vocation which has been given to the diocese. Some time ago I realized once again that for us, Christians of the modern world, vocation is the very foundation of our lives, and that our need to respond to the call of God is nothing other than living by ‘faith’. This faith, however, must be ‘genuine faith’. It is by living the vocation we have grasped through this ‘genuine faith’ we can become ‘true believers’.

I have therefore chosen ‘faith’ as the theme for this year. For Christians truly to be called ‘believers’ their every thought and action must be based on ‘faith’. Taking a fresh look at their own faith is the starting point from which believers can begin to evangelize themselves. I would like us, by critically reflecting on what kind of faith we ourselves have, to aspire for repentance and maturity of faith.

2 ‘What’ do you believe about God?

Faith is a human response to divine revelation, but faith is also participation in the personal love of God. When Christians believe in God they not only believe and confess that God exists they also believe in God’s love and compassion and are called upon actively to entrust themselves to that love and compassion. The faith of Christians is not only acknowledging the existence of God, accepting what is written in the bible and giving their assent to it, it is also entrusting their entire existence to God whom they are able, because they have met with Christ and are in fellowship with the Holy Spirit, to call ‘Abba’ (papa). Christians don’t just believe that some theory or ‘.ism’ is correct; they believe in God whom they are able, with complete sincerity, to address familiarly as ‘you’. This kind of faith arises from a feeling of being personally called by Him who eternally transcends all things

3 Do You Feel, at All Times, that You Are Called by God?

Perhaps catechumens too have faith to believe in God without realizing it; perhaps we who want to believe have a faith whose fire is flickering and in danger of being extinguished. Faith

does not arise from human will or striving; it is something which becomes apparent one day through a 'spiritual sensation' working within me. This happens because God gives people the ability to faith which comes from the Holy Spirit. God has been pleased to give you, **“a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him,..... with the eyes of your heart enlightened”** (Eph 1:17-18). (*)

God works in two ways to influence people, from outside and from within. The bible tells us that God intervenes in human history to begin salvation history: He calls the People of Israel and sends Christ to complete His revelation. We have been led to faith in this God through the mediation of the Church which believes and inherits the witness of Christ. In other words through human agency and events God reveals in history his will for salvation. Besides this guidance God also works through a voice audible to the human heart to invite people to a dialogue with Himself. I wonder if we are always attentive to this invitation and really determined to accept it?

4 Are You Close to God who Cannot be Seen?

There are two approaches which can take in response to faith. One, as I have already said, is to believe in, and entrust oneself to, the love and compassion of God. The other is, being sensitive to word and symbol, to come close to God who cannot be seen in the midst of ordinary life through visible signs (symbols).

A person who comes to believe in God does not rely on his own wisdom, strength or wealth but, rather, on the eternal God Himself. This God reveals himself to each and everyone who believes in him. Saint Paul says, **“I know in whom I have put my trust”** (2 Tim 1:12) but we could say that 'believing' is not so much a single isolated act as setting out on a process. Because God is a living being He is present as one who pours out His own love and compassion into the heart of a person who hungers and thirsts for Him. On the basis of a personal relationship with God, whom we can address familiarly as 'you', a relationship full of divine love, we strive to 'see', by faith, with the 'eyes of the heart' the God who cannot be seen.

5 Is Christ Present in Your Faith?

There can never be a Christian faith from which Christ is excluded. This is an obvious fact but to what extent are we made aware of it in our faith lives? Let us consider in turn each of the three points made in the doxology recited at the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer at Mass: “Through Him, with Him, in Him”.

- Through Christ

The faith of the Christian Church is one which perceives God the Father through Christ. As St John says, **“No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son** (in other words Jesus Christ), **who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known”**

(John 1:18).

In the same way that people who lived at the time of Jesus came to believe that 'God is Love' through His words and deeds, we have come to know God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit through the gospel which Christ proclaimed.

- With Christ

As well as believing in Christ we also believe, with Christ, in God the Father. Christ is not only the object of faith, as the Word 'made flesh' He is the 'way' to the Father, the 'mediator' between us and the Father, and the 'exemplar' for our faith. Christ is, "**the pioneer and perfecter of our faith**" (Heb 12:2). Jesus the Son of God, responding to God the Father who loves, and indeed is love, entrusted Himself to the Father. As brothers and sisters of Christ, who share in His way of looking at things, His set of values, the mystery of His personality we look upon the Father together with Christ who shoulders our weaknesses.

- In Christ

As well as being quite simply voluntary acts of an individual, our acts of faith can also be supernatural acts worked by the Holy Spirit who infinitely transcends the individual. "**No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit**" (1 Cor 12:3). When united with Christ I who believe, even though my existence is limited can say, "**It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me**" (Gal 2:20).

6 Is the Mass the Centre of your Faith?

"Sacraments not only presuppose faith...they also nourish strengthen and express it: that is why they are called 'Sacraments of Faith'" (Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 59). The Mass, especially, the Rite of the Eucharist which celebrates the 'Blessed Sacrament', is the source and summit of a life of faith. The sacraments are not events by which the grace of God is automatically distributed; they are essentially actions of Christ performed by the minister and participants and so events in which we encounter Christ. We must aim, therefore, for a Mass on the Lord's Day especially, which is properly prepared for by the community and in which everyone can take part wholeheartedly. It is precisely because, in the Mass, we encounter Christ who cannot be seen that we can become a "visible sign" of invisible grace. No matter how much we emphasize the importance of the Mass it is impossible to over-emphasize, so please reflect frequently about whether we are celebrating the Mass properly as the centre of our faith lives and with enthusiasm.

7 Is Your Faith reflected in Your Day to Day Life?

The separation of Faith and Life is a problem of which we should keep a careful eye on even in our faith lives. When people know God they are given a practical grace to apply their faith in their lives but this wisdom must be used in the ordinary activities of everyday life. In this way faith does not remain at the level of a hidden certainty within us but becomes a strength to open

ourselves to others, to struggle against selfishness and to begin and continue loving all our neighbours as brothers sisters. When we talk about using our faith in every day life, this is not thinking that we may gain some benefit from keeping the commandments; nor is putting into practice the commandment of love the kind of empty moralism which assumes it is fine to do bad things or to be a nuisance to people.

Just now the Japanese Church is continuing its efforts to build an ecclesial community together with Catholics different nationalities. By coming into contact with Christians from other countries like the Philippines and Latin-American countries where, historically, Christianity has taken a firm hold we Japanese can learn many things from them. We need to learn more about things like praying in the home, handing on the faith to children, cherishing the family, asking for God's protection and praying thanks in any and every aspect of life which amount to a "habituated faith", truly part of oneself.

8 Is Your Faith Living the Peace of God?

"Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" (Mark 4:40). There is probably no one who doesn't feel the angst of life and it would be impossible to eradicate it. The Christian Faith does not do away with anxiety but inculcates an attitude of life which accepts it as it is. We who believe in God, of course, do not know everything; many enigmas remain. People who know and believe in the love of God, however, are given a clear guiding principle so that they can place all the events of life in proper perspective. The greatest anxiety of life is being unable to understand which direction to proceed.

Jesus repeatedly said to those he had healed, "Your faith has made you well" (Matt 9:22; Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50 etc.). He is teaching us that the experience of salvation through faith is the 'Peace' (*Shalom*) which Christ gives. Is not our faith a way of life by which, no matter how our individual circumstances might change, we are aware of our own powerlessness and believe that God will provide; such that we do not give in when caught up in a reality not of our own choosing and we are faced with 'trials of faith' but place our hope in God who is faithful.

9 Is Your Faith the Story of Your Life?

We Christians are people like the wise man who, "**Built his house (life) on the rock** (Christ the foundation)" (Matt 7:24). For that very reason we can find our purpose in life through Christ. By faith we can discover the meaning of our own lives, the purpose of life and the direction of world history. Furthermore faith sheds light on the question of who I am, giving a firm foundation to my identity as someone loved and sustained by God. A Christian is not simply someone who belongs to the Catholic Church and, depending solely on its teaching and set of values, moves along with feet barely touching the ground. The Christian Faith synthesizes life into a meaningful story by intertwining my past with the present as I find in Christ, during my one and only lifetime, the experience of salvation, which is 'liberation and freedom'. In other

words God reveals himself to me in the story of my life.

Furthermore the Christian Faith teaches people that they should live for others on this life and, urging them to spend themselves to implant gospel values in Society, teaches that what gives us grounds for hope in life transcends this world. Accepting our situation no matter what difficulties we may encounter, therefore, we believe in the 'promise' that ultimately we shall be freed from evil and from death, and draw from it the strength to live. Actually, the faith we have now, far from deserting us when we are facing death, is preparing us to be ready peacefully to entrust ourselves to the Father who is the source of love and life.

10 Might Not Your Faith Be Complacent?

Could our faith be a faith which bears no fruit? In other words might it be a self-centred, self-righteous faith which calls on God only to ask for consolation so that we may feel good about ourselves? Whichever way we look at it a discrepancy is bound to arise between the expression of faith as it ought to be and that of an individualistic faith. There is only one Christian faith but from age to age, or because of the differences between people, there is, and has been, great diversity in ways of expressing that faith. Because there is no such thing as individual faith we need to look to what has always been attested so that through that our faith may be purified and deepened.

Certainty of faith sometimes takes misguided forms. During the history of the Church there can be seen instances of works of devotion which began in good faith but turned to superstition or spurred on fanaticism. It is essential, therefore, that the faithful open themselves to the 'Church's teaching office (*magisterium*)' and the 'sense of faith of all believers (*sensus fidelium*)' and accept their position (Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 12). As I said in my New Year Pastoral Letter in 2009, with respect to vocation 'Faithfulness in obedience to God' is essential. Even though we say that we are obedient to God, we are sometimes obedient only to ourselves. This is human weakness and is sin. When wondering whether the way we express our faith is appropriate we need always to undergo discernment according to the gospel and its clear criterion: Christ himself.

11 Are You Living your Faith with your Fellow-Believers?

A Christian doesn't believe all alone. When we say 'I believe' we join our voices to all those who share the faith of the Church which is one. All Christians believe together, all love one another, and all hope for eternal life. I cannot have faith all by myself; faith is intrinsically communal and is only possible as 'believing together'.

The unity and fellowship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (*koinonia*) is the pattern and source of the community of faith. The fellowship of each one of us with God instantly gives rise to the fellowship of the community of faith, and through this community faith is further strengthened and deepened. In order to ascertain the content of your faith, and the way you

respond to it, you need the faith-experience of other Christians. That is why we take part in faith-sharing. The Church is not simply a place where we go to take part in the Mass. The Church community is not something which is not something which 'exists' before we arrive; it comes about when those whom god has called meet enthusiastically to 'form' it. Do we really want to live the faith with our fellow-believers.

12 Does your Faith Serve the Spirit of Christ?

"All of us (will) come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Eph 4:13). We the faithful of the Particular Church, Kyoto Diocese, the block system and activities for collaborative ministry and mission exist to build up the Church which is the Body of Christ and "serves Christ's Spirit who vivifies the Church" (Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 8). The work done by the Parish Pastoral Council and the Pastoral Activity Sectors are worthless unless each and every parishioner becomes a community which shares the Word and the Bread of Life. It is certainly not my fundamental intention as bishop to bind every parishioner to the operation and maintenance of the parish. A community which serves the Spirit of Christ always gives priority to the organization. Even in error, we must never confuse the faith development of the community with the introduction of a new system.

13 Let Us Pray for the Courage to Live Our Faith

"Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Luke 1:45). By faith like Mary's, we too can become, like her, blessed people who believe in the will and purpose of God. Living the faith has always, in whatever era, required courage but this is especially true now. Although for people of today living itself needs courage, for Christians who place their hope in what cannot be seen even greater courage is necessary. We do not live our faith, however, by our own human ability but by the grace of courage given us by God.

The faith which Christ has chosen to give us is immeasurably abundant and I cannot, in this letter, enumerate every single aspect of what it means to have faith. My chief aim in writing it has been to re-think my own faith from within; in next year's part two I will try to think about our vocation to bear witness to the faith.

January 1, 2011

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

(*) All quotations from the Bible are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version*