

Living the Spirit in our Advent Faith



Our formal prayer in Advent is that we may watch and prepare for the coming of Christ with steadfast faith, joyful hope, and untiring love. We make this prayer as members of the Church, those whom the angels would consider as both persons of good will and those on whom God's favor rests.

This week I offer some reflections on faith. Faith for the Catholic Christian is a virtue, or habit of good. Our theologians speak of faith as a virtue that comes with Baptism, ready to be activated according to the circumstances of one's life. Indeed, when our church law wants to describe the members of the Church it speaks of them as the "faithful."

One problem in understanding this theme is that too often our ideas about faith are a bit fuzzy. Part of this comes from the fact that there is such a thing as natural faith, which in itself has little to do with religious or supernatural faith. Natural faith is trust. We trust others in our daily life. Children take the information given them with trust - even if later they learn that there are different meanings to what they are told. I think here of that faith I put (and you, too?) in my parents' assurance that there is a Santa Claus. Later I learned that this Santa was much like what Virginia learned from the Chicago Sun.

The Church [*We are the Church*] prays in these Advent days to be steadfast in our faith because faith is very demanding. It is not a gift that comes without serious obligations. Our faith has nothing less than God and the things of God as its object. In the Creed at Sunday Mass we say: "I believe in God " That is supernatural faith, easy to say, but sometimes far harder to translate into our actions.

Faith as a part of our Catholic cultures(s) has taken shape in many different ways. The Church has taken signs and symbols from the various civilizations of human history and "Christianized" them. It continues to add dimensions to our spiritual life by giving special, even contemporary, meaning to its rituals and sacraments. Sacraments, we know well, are a vital part of any Catholic theology and Catholic way of life.

In Baptism we see in a washing with water, a very natural action, something far more valuable. The water becomes a symbol of a cleansing from sin (original sin often being the only sin to be so cleansed). It also is a fact that water is a necessary ingredient for life. This is why we keep searching for it on Mars. The waters of baptism, however, are seen as making fertile the ground for all those good deeds that will mark the life of a faithful Christian. Our baptism continues to be active through our faith and its works.

Confirmation used to stress the fact that we may have to suffer and die for our faith. Today that aspect is less in view. However, there is no Christian life in which there will not be some suffering, or at the very least difficulty or inconvenience, in making the right moral choices. We can see how Catholic politicians are having such problems being faithful where moral choices, such as abortion or conscience rights, are involved.

Of course, the summit of our faith is the Eucharist. There we come to a demand to believe what we call the Mystery of Faith. Our belief somehow takes root in our early experiences of religion, and it grows and matures. Thus, today you and I can affirm without hesitation that in the Eucharist Jesus Christ is present Body and Blood, soul, and divinity, under the appearances of bread and wine.

Today our way of life is very challenged. Frankly, most of us, even religious leaders like priests, are just too busy with many, many things. If we want to have a steadfast faith, without wavering or doubts the very first thing we must do is to make room for God in our lives. It is not for me to tell you how to do this. You must look deeply into yourself and see what is possible. I am not saying that you should not do all those wonderful preparations for celebrating Christmas. I am saying that maybe you have to see *how* you are doing the preparation. If you are becoming more and more grumpy, tense, stressed out, then maybe you will have to decide to cut back here or there.

What I hope you will not do is cast away all the spiritual for the material aspects of the feast to come. I have known many fine Catholic Christians who have managed to balance the natural and the spiritual, the material and the supernatural. I see some at daily Mass. I note the many who find time to think of the poor and disadvantaged at Christmas. I happen to believe (with a natural faith or trust) that you have known such persons as well. Maybe you see that person when you look in the mirror. I hope so!

Read you bulletin and you will find at least a few activities that have some spiritual content. Perhaps some of them simply highlight the communion of faith that makes a parish what it is. Think of how you may be a part of that communion of the faithful. For those who are homebound, you too can make Advent a time for giving a gift to the Church. Do it by praying for the souls in Purgatory. Do it by offering your aches and pains for filling up the spiritual treasury of the Church. Say a Rosary each day (or as a Novena) for peace, real peace in our troubled world. Dare to show your faith in public; say grace before a restaurant meal. Yet, mean what you say!

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Since these inserts are meant to have a personal side, I will speak of my own faith. Thank God, I have never really doubted it. I have not been gullible. I did study the theological tract on faith. In that study some questions could trouble a soul seeking absolute assurance in matters of belief. I accepted, however, that mysteries remain mysteries. I am the first to admit my limitations of mind and heart. Indeed, I am convinced that I have all I can do with what I have in both.

I have found the wonderful truth that faith has given meaning to some of the more difficult aspects of life. Like many I know, I put more value upon God's mercy than His justice, and on His love than His revelation of truth. I really do believe that Jesus has come to me (and you) over and over again. In the Eucharist, especially. I do believe in His presence even in times of great stress. Sometimes that presence is found in those He places in my life. And yes, He comes with forgiveness in Reconciliation. As a wise person once said: faith is a fire in the heart. For this gift I give God thanks and praise!

Can you say the same about your own faith as you journey to God?

God love you always!
Monsignor Morrison