

When we use the word faith what do we mean?

Well first, faith is a content, what do we believe. Right after the homily today we will pray the words of the creed. This is a statement of what our faith is. It is a succinct summary of the key teachings, the key dogmas of our faith.

In common speech the word faith also means a trust in a certain power, or the belief that there are resources out there so that we can triumph over the trials that plague us. Now this faith can be religious. I have faith in the power of prayer, I have faith that with God's help I will get through this. Or it may not be religious. We all get together on a Sunday morning and go running in the park because we have faith that cancer can be beaten or I need to have faith in myself and then I will succeed in my chosen career. We tell young people at their graduation have faith in yourselves and all things are possible. In both cases faith is here related to a belief in a power, a strength which is beneficial to us in some way.

But is this what faith really about? The Franciscan priest Father Richard Rohr gives us this definition of faith. He says, **"Faith is having the security to be insecure, the security to live in an identity other than our own and to find our value and significance in that larger union....** And it always feels like dying. Every moment towards union will be experienced as a loss of self-importance and a loss of control. No wonder faith is so rare and we substitute it with nice religion."

Here faith is really not an empowering reality but a reality that admits weakness, it is about humility; it is about turning away from self to discover the truth of the transcendent God. Faith is about gaining God and we can only do so if we are willing to lose our self-importance, to lose control.

Rohr describes faith as the courage to live in an identity other than our own and for the Christian we identify with Christ, we live in him. And the readings today all describe that identity towards which we are called to strive.

The Gospel begins with the pettiness of the apostles. How can we gain the seats of power at the right and left hand of the Messiah? But Jesus instructs them about the need to identify with him. Those who identify with the Son of Man will identify with the one who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Isaiah today speaks about the suffering servant. Christians have interpreted these words as a prophesy about the coming Messiah, Jesus who will bear our sufferings, who will be crushed for the sins of us all.

And finally from the letter to the Hebrews, "For we do not have such a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin." Actually Jesus is the one who identifies with us in our weakness, and alienation from God.

And so faith is about discovering our value and significance in an identity other than our own, in our identity with Christ. The readings describe that identity, the suffering servant, the High Priest who knows our weaknesses, the Son of Man who came to serve not to be served. In faith, will we identify ourselves with Christ. Will we discover our true value and significance in him in our union with Him or will we simply replace faith with nice religion.