

SESSION 7: FAITH NOT FEAR

COMMIT - DAY 1: THE VOICE OF GOD

“Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?” – Mark 4:40

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus urges his followers to have faith. He chides those who should know better for their lack of faith, while he praises the faith of unlikely supplicants like the Canaanite woman and the centurion who approach him to beg for healing.

Read Matthew 15:21-28/ Mark 5:25-34; and Luke 7:1-10. How do the people in these stories demonstrate their faith?

Faith is commonly defined as confidence, trust, or firm belief. Looking at the examples cited above, it's clear that the people coming to Jesus trust that he can bring healing. But the faith that Jesus desires to find in his follower goes even deeper. The New Testament Letter to the Hebrews gives us a profound description of faith, illustrated by examples from the Old Testament with special emphasis on Abraham. Read Hebrews 11:1-22. How does the author of the Letter to the Hebrews describe faith? How would you define faith, based on the example of Abraham?

The *Catechism* tells us that faith is a gift from God; it is one of the three theological or supernatural virtues that the soul receives at Baptism and it makes us able to act as God's children *CCC, 153, 1813). Like all the other virtues, it is an “habitual and firm disposition” (CCC, 1803), which disposes us “to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity” (CCC, 1812). This faith is a cooperation between God's grace and our intellect – an action on our part that is only possible with the help of the Holy Spirit. Faith leads to action; as Saint James tells us, “So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (James 2:17).

Because the virtue of faith comes from God and is not merely a quality of our own intellect, faith brings certitude: “it is more certain than all human knowledge because it is founded on the very word of God who cannot lie” (CCC, 157). This doesn't mean that faith automatically gives us full understanding, or even that having faith is always easy. It means that our faith is founded on who God is and what he says – not who we are or what we are capable of understanding. With God himself as the source and foundation of our faith, we are able to hold fast to our faith and “run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1). This “conviction of things unseen” allows us to “walk by faith, not by sight” and to “rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy” (see Hebrews 11:1; 2 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:8-9).

“Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.”

-Attributed to Saint Augustine

While the gift of faith is something we receive, we need to actively cultivate it and cooperate with it. Otherwise, as Paul warns Timothy, it is entirely possible to “make shipwreck of [our] faith” if we do not work to protect and develop it (1 Timothy 1:18-19). The *Catechism* gives us a game plan for how to

“live, grow, and persevere in the faith” by nourishing our faith with the works of charity (see CCC, 162).

“I believe; help my unbelief!” - Mark 9:24

What has nourished the gift of faith in your life in the past? What can you do to work to further deepen your faith now?

Faith and Reason

“Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth.

- Pope St. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*

COMMIT - DAY 2: TOUCHING CHRIST IN THE SACRAMENTS

Have you ever read the Gospels and wished that you could have been there? Jesus said that we are blessed when we believe even though we have not seen him (see John 20:29), but wouldn't it have been nice to see with our own eyes and hear with our own ears? If you could go back and witness one scene out of the Gospels in person, which one would it be? Why?

The Bible makes it clear that Jesus wants to give us his grace and his life. He spent the year of his public ministry not only healing the sick but also, and even more importantly, restoring people to spiritual health. He made this ultimate healing possible for each of us through his Passion, Death and Resurrection, and he instituted the seven sacraments as particular ways that we would have direct access to him and to his grace he won for us.

“To accomplish so great a work, Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister, ‘the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross,’ but especially under the Eucharistic species. By his power He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes. He is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for He promised; ‘Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them’ (Matthew 18:20).”

-Second Vatican Council, Sacrosanctum Consilium, 7

We touch Jesus in the sacraments. Because they are a divine action and not a human institution, we have confidence that they are efficacious: “celebrated worthily in faith, the sacraments confer the grace that they signify” (CCC, 1127). This is what the Church means when it says that the sacraments act *ex opera operato*, a Latin phrase that means “from the work worked.” In other words, the power and grace of the sacraments are objective realities. The sacraments confer God's grace not because of the faith or worthiness of the priest administering the sacrament or the person receiving the sacrament, but by the power of God.

“When you approach the Tabernacle remember that he has been awaiting your for twenty centuries.” - Saint Josemaria Escrivá

In Persona Christi Capitis

Jesus is present to us in the sacraments not only in the sense that it is his grace that we receive, but also because it is Christ who acts in each of the sacraments. The Church describes this reality as the bishop (or priest) acting in **persona Christi capitis**, “in the person of Christ the Head.” This means that all the power and authority belong to Christ, and the priest truly makes him present to us. Although we see and hear the priest administering the sacraments, it is really Jesus who is at work in each of the sacraments of his Church (see CCC, 1548).

COMMIT - DAY 3: LECTIO: STORM ON THE SEA

Storms in life are inevitable. Physical, emotional, spiritual – this world basically guarantees us challenges and difficulties. But an even more profound truth is that God never abandons us to face these storms alone. He is always with us. The less we react to the wind and waves with fear, and the more we place our faith in God, the easier it is to weather the storms of life.

LECTIO: The practice of praying with Scripture begins with an active and close reading of the Scripture passage. Read the verse below and then answer the questions to take a closer look at some of the details of the passage.

“on that day, when evening had come, he said to them, ‘Let us go across to the other side.’ And leaving the crowd, they took him with them, just as he was, in the boat. And other boats were with him. And a great storm of wind arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care if we perish?’ And he awoke and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, ‘Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?’ And they were filled with awe, and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?’”
-Mark 4:35-41

How does Saint Mark describe the storm?

How does Mark describe the disciples? How does he describe Jesus?

What happens when Jesus rebukes the storm? How do the disciples respond?

MEDITATIO: *Lectio*, a close reading and rereading is followed by *meditation*, a time to reflect on the Scripture passage and to ponder the reasons for particular events, descriptions, details, phrases, and even echoes from other Scripture passages that were noticed during *lectio*. Take some time now to meditate on the above verse.

“He said to the disciples when the storm arose, ‘Why are ye fearful?’ That is, you ought to hope, you ought to trust, you ought to repose your heart on Me. I am not only almighty, but I am all merciful. I have come on earth because I am most loving to you. ... The storm cannot hurt you if I am with you. Can you be better placed than under my protection? Do you doubt My power or My will, do you think

Me **negligent** of you that I sleep in the ship, and **unable** to help you except I am awake? Wherefore do you doubt? Wherefore do you fear? Have I been so long with you, and you do not yet trust Me, and cannot remain in peace and quiet by My side... Do at least as much as what the disciples did. They had but **little faith**, they feared, they had not any great confidence and peace, but at least they did not keep away from Christ. They did not sit still sullenly, but they came to Him. Alas, our very best state is not higher than the Apostles' worst state. Our Lord blamed them as having little faith, because they cried out to Him. I wish we Christians of this day did as much as this. I wish we went as far as to cry out to Him in alarm. I wish we had only as much faith and hope as that which Christ thought so little in His first disciples.... And as He on this occasion spoken of in the Gospel, blamed indeed the disciples, but did for them what they asked, so (we will trust in His great mercy), though He discerns much infirmity in you which ought not to be there, yet He will deign to rebuke the winds and the sea, and say "Peace, be still," and there will be a great calm."

-From a sermon by Blessed John Henry Newman (emphasis added)

What is your first reaction to the storms and trouble of life? Why?

Consider Rembrandt's painting of *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee*. Where are you in the boat?

When you are tempted to respond to the storm in fear, what concrete action can you take to choose faith over fear?

ORATIO, CONTEMPLATIO, RESOLUTIO: Having read and meditates on today's Scripture passage, take some time to pray – bringing your thoughts to God (*oratio*) – and to be receptive to God's grace in silence (*contemplation*). Then end your prayer by making a simple concrete resolution (*resolution*) to respond to God's prompting of you heart in today's prayer.

**"The most beautiful act of faith is the one made in darkness, in sacrifice,
and with extreme effort."**

Saint Padre Pio



Christ in the storm by Rembrandt

COMMIT - DAY 4: BROTHERS AND SISTERS

The Catholic Church holds as a truth of the Faith Mary’s “real and perpetual virginity” (CCC, 499). This means not only that Mary was a virgin when Jesus was conceived in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit, but also that she remained a virgin for her entire life. If Mary remained perpetually a virgin, of course, she could not have had any other biological children. So how are we to read the references to Jesus’s brothers and sisters in Mark 3:31-32 and 6:3?

The Greek words used in these passages (and their parallels in the other synoptic Gospels) are *adelphos* (singular) and *adelphoi* (plural). This word does mean “brother(s)” or ‘brothers and sisters,” but it could also refer to any close relative. We find *adelphos* used this way in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

The Septuagint
In the third century BC, a group of Jewish scholars in Alexandria, Egypt, translated important Jewish texts – including nearly all of what we now call the Old Testament – from Hebrew into Greek. The translation is known as Septuagint, from the Greek word for “seventy,” because according to tradition, seventy scholars were involved in the work of translation.

Look up the Scripture passages in the chart below. Each of these passages use the Hebrew word for brother, *ah* (plural *ahim*). What word does your Bible use to translate *ah* in each of these passages? Considering the context of these verses, what variety of family relationships are described by this one Hebrew word?

Verse	Translation of <i>ah/ahim</i> in your Bible	Actual relationship
Genesis 4:8	“Cain said to Abel his [<i>ah</i>]” _____	
Genesis 13:8	“for we are [<i>ahim</i>]” _____	
Genesis 29:12 Genesis 19:15	“he was her father’s [<i>ah</i>]” _____ “Because you are my [<i>ah</i>]” _____	
1 Chronicles 23:22	“their [<i>ahim</i>], the sons of Kish” _____	

We have already noted that Greek had a specific word for ‘kinsman,’ so why brother looking at the Hebrew of the Old Testament? Because there was already a precedent among Jewish writes for using the Greek *adelphos* in a broader context than full siblings.

The Jewish scholars who translated the Septuagint used the Greek *adelphos* to translate the Hebrew *ah* throughout. So, in Genesis 13:8 Laban literally says to his nephew Jacob “because you are my brother.” The Septuagint’s broad use of *adelphos* establishes a precedent for understanding the “brothers and sisters” of Jesus to be extended family rather than other biological children of Mary.

But there are additional reasons these relatives cannot be his siblings. Mark 6:3 identifies four ‘brothers’ of Jesus by name: James, Joses (of Joseph, see Matthew 13:55), Judas, and Simon. With a little digging, we find some crucial information on two of these “brothers.” Look up Mark 15:40 and John 10:25. Who were the parents of James and Joses?

Another compelling piece of evidence that Mary had no other children comes in Joh’s account of the Crucifixion. Right before Jesus breathed his last and gave up his spirit, he gave his mother into the care of his beloved disciple. If Mary had any other biological children, they would have been responsible for her care after the death of Jesus. Instead, because she had no other children, Jesus gives her as mother to John, and to all of us.

Read John 19:26-27. Reflect on Jesus’s words as if spoken directly to you: “Behold, your mother!” What impact do these words have on your relationship with Mary?

“Jesus Christ, after having given us all he could give, that is to say, the merit of his toils, his sufferings, and bitter death; after having given us his adorable body and blood to be the food of our souls, willed also to give us the most precious thing he had left, which was his holy Mother.”

-Saint John Vianney

COMMIT – DAY 5: TRUTH AND BEAUTY

Healing of the Hemorrhaging Woman,

All three synoptic Gospels record Jesus's encounter and healing of the hemorrhaging woman. As he travels from town to town, healing people from their infirmities, forgiving their sins and casting out evil spirits, Jesus's fame spreads. When he returns from the area of the Gerasenes back to the other side of the sea, a crowd is waiting to welcome him, to hear him teach, and to bring to him those who are in need of healing.

As he heads to the home of Jairus, the crowd follows, pressing around Jesus. Amongst the crowd is a woman who has a "flow of blood" and has been hemorrhaging for twelve years. Year after year she has seen doctors, spend all she had to find a cure, and has come up empty-worse than empty, her condition has deteriorated. No one has been able to help her.

Like the crowd, this woman too has heard the reports of Jesus, of his incredible healing power, and what she has heard has enkindled faith. Perhaps she heard of Jesus's touch that healed the unclean leper (see Mark 1:40-42) – perhaps he could heal even her. Now that he is close by, her hope is animated, and she joins those following after Jesus. She makes her way closer, thinking, "If I touch even his garments, I shall be made well" (Mark 5:28).

Look up Leviticus 15:25-27. What does it say about the consequences of having a discharge of blood? Who and what is affected?

The continual hemorrhaging makes her ritually unclean. She doesn't presume to ask Jesus to heal her, knowing that by the Law one who touches what is unclean is also made unclean. So, she comes up behind Jesus to touch the fringe of his garment.

Healing of the Hemorrhaging Woman,

Daniel Cariola, Encounter Chapel in Duc in Altum, Magdala, Israel



Daniel Cariola's *Healing of the Hemorrhaging Woman* captures the moment and gives us a close up from an unexpected perspective. We don't see the crowd from above, but rather from the ground, just inches above the dusty road on which Jesus, his disciples, and the crowd walk. The painting is filled with sandal-clad feet and the edges of tunics and robes. In the midst of these we see the hand of the

hemorrhaging woman reach in to touch Jesus. Cariola illustrates Jesus's healing power by a small aura of divine light at the point of contact. At the heart of the painting in the midst of such ordinary things-feet, toes, a hand, the coarse edge of clothing-a gleam of divine light announces the love of God that is about to change this woman's life.

Her ritual impurity is not transferred to Jesus: rather his healing power is poured into her. Jesus remains clean, but the woman no longer remains as she was. She is healed, made clean, in body and soul. We have a faint indication of this in the white color of the robes of both Jesus, the source of divine grace and healing, and the woman, the recipient of God's gracious gift.

Jesus, known all things, perceives that power has gone out from him and asks, "Who was it that touched me?" (Luke 8:45). The disciples are confounded that Jesus asks such a question given the size of the crowd that presses in around him. Many in the crowd have touched Jesus as he walks along the road to Jairus's house, but only one touched him with the faith that drew down an abundant outpouring of God's grace.

With her touch the hemorrhaging woman's heart called out to Jesus. And the Lord responds not only with healing power, but he searches the crowd for her. Now the hemorrhaging woman encounters Jesus not from behind, but face to face. She comes forward to explain, falling down before the Lord. Jesus responds not with chastisement, but with love. He calls her "daughter," welcoming her back into the family of God, praising her faith ("Your faith has made you well") and sending her on as his disciple ("Go in peace") (Mark 5:34).

The healing of the hemorrhaging woman has appeared in Christian art through the centuries. Interestingly, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in its official version, included five images one for the *Catechism* as a whole (this image of a shepherd sitting under a tree, staff in hand and piping a tune of his sheep, can often be seen on the cover of many printed versions of the *Catechism*), and then four additional images, one for each of the four sub-sections of the Catechism. The image that prefaces the second section of the *Catechism*, "The Celebration of the Christian Mystery," which presents the Church's teaching on the liturgy and the sacraments, is an early fourth-century fresco of Jesus and the hemorrhaging woman.

In the Church's liturgy and sacraments, we encounter the divine power of the Son of God, just as the hemorrhaging woman did when she reached out to touch the humanity of Christ. The *Catechism* affirms that in her liturgy and sacraments "Christ himself is at work: it is he who baptizes, he who acts in his sacraments" (CCC, 1127). Jesus Christ Our Lord, through the liturgy and sacraments he gave his Church, invites us to reach out, like the hemorrhaging women, and touch him. His passing by, searching the crowd for us, longing to fill us with the grace-we just need to reach out with faith.