

19th Sunday Ordinary Time Year "C" *Looking for Signs*

August 10-11, 2013

Readings: Wisdom 18:6-9; Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19; Luke 12:32-48 (or 35-40)

"If God would just show me a sign of His presence, then I would believe." I have heard this common and sincere plea many, many times over the years. And yet, as we learn in today's 2nd reading, the sentiment I described, while perhaps understandable, is precisely why we have faith in the first place—we believe even though we do not see clearly. God will continue to show forth signs of His presence, but these signs are not typically demonstrable signs.

Faith is often lived in some darkness; too often we see signs, not of God's presence, but His absence. In part it is because the bad news is so routinely reported; the Good News does not sell. We have to go looking for it. By the same token, our lives can be filled with struggles, and the burdens seem overwhelming. What are we to do?

The best definition of faith I have ever seen is given to us in the second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews. "Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen." Faith is a realization—in other words, faith has a goal, it has a definite 'content', it is not simply a 'shot in the dark.'

In the New Testament the Greek words for "faith" and "belief" occur nearly 500 times. It is not blind, but is guided, just as Abraham was guided. He obeyed when he was called to go out to a foreign land; he was called to trust and that he did.

Before this faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist him; he must have the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts it to God, who opens the eyes of the mind and 'makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth.'¹

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. # 153. See *Dei Verbum*, n. 5 Vatican Council II

Faith is that instrument by which we remain grounded- both in this life and in eternal life to which we are called. It is dangerous to think that our faith will always be secure. People, some very good people, lose their faith. It becomes lukewarm and then dissipates altogether. Without nourishment, the life of faith within will die.

The 1st Commandment requires us to nourish our faith and to protect it with prudence and vigilance, and to reject everything that is opposed to it. But for faith to mean anything, at the very least its content is reasonable and not contrary to reason. Reason can take us to the door, but faith helps us cross the threshold. St. Thomas Aquinas described faith in similar terms, with a different emphasis: “Faith is a habit of the mind whereby eternal life is begun in us making the intellect assent to what is non-apparent.”²

Just because something is non-apparent, does not mean that it is absent. Not all reality is visible to the senses. Faith opens up a new horizon of life in communion with God. And God will open the door of faith for those who sincerely seek Him. But we must also guard against voluntary doubt—that which refuses to hold as true that which God has revealed, for this is a serious sin if deliberately cultivated. It leads to spiritual blindness. This is different in substance from those periods of questioning which at times lead to involuntary doubt. Cardinal Newman wrote: “Ten thousand difficulties do not equal one doubt.”³

And yet in the end, as Pope Benedict XVI so beautifully reminded us, “Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy.”⁴ Let us rejoice in this promise from the Lord.

² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 4, a. 1.

³ John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua* (London Longman, 1878) 239.

⁴ Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter in the form of a *motu proprio*, *Porta Fidei*, for the announcement of the Year of Faith, no. 7.