

Introduction

In preparation for this day of reflection, a planning group looked at your core values (family, fellowship, and faith). In our discussion some of the questions that were raised were:

- What is the place of faith in our organisation?
- Why does our organisation exist?
- Why do we, as a group, do what we do?
- How do we get back to our grass roots?

All these questions seemed to lead to the theme of the relationship between 'faith and works'.

Gospel Reading (Lk 10:38-42)

This Gospel highlights a tension between faith (which is an intimate relationship with God nourished through prayer) and works (the way our relationship with God impacts our lives and effects the way we live). This tension, which we see in the Gospel between Mary and Martha, continues throughout the ages to our present day.

In our own culture today, there is a tendency to push faith to the realm of the private and subjective. There seems to be a separation between what one believes and how a person is called to live. I believe there is a tendency among many Catholics to view their faith as something simply done on Sunday with little impact on the rest of the week. Our culture tends to separate faith from objective life. There is a temptation to think I have my faith and you have yours. There is a temptation to think different faith backgrounds lead to the same place. In some cases we have Catholic parents who don't baptise their children, but say "I will let them decide." My question in response is: Do you let your child choose to eat whatever he or she

wants? Do you let your child choose if he or she wants to go to school? We see something objectively good and true about a healthy diet and education, why is this different with our faith. At the heart of these issues is a misunderstanding between faith and works.

In this reflection I will focus on two topics: 'the foundation of faith' and 'the work of a disciple'. Hopefully, this will shed light on life as a Catenian. How is a Catenian called to nurture the faith and perform works as a disciple?

The Foundation of Faith

"Mary has chosen the better part"

Faith gives us meaning by highlighting the reason why we do the things we do.

Faith is fundamental for our lives. I would like to highlight some aspects of faith.

A living faith requires two fundamental attitudes: certitude and humility. Certitude is the conviction that our Catholic faith has the objective truth about the reality of God. There are many religions in the world, and they have elements of the truth, but our Catholic faith has the fulness of truth, revealed by God. Of course the nature of God goes beyond us, but even so our Catholic faith proclaims the truth of who God is and how we are to live a life in union with God. If we don't believe we have THE TRUTH why would we ever try to evangelise? If all faiths lead to the same place, why did Christ command His disciples to spread the Gospel to the whole world? Without a conviction in the faith, why would a parent baptise their child? The

Catholic faith proclaims the truth that points to eternal life. We need to believe this with conviction.

Humility is the second fundamental attitude of our faith. Certitude needs to be united with humility. The fact that the Catholic faith has the fulness of the truth shouldn't give us a superiority complex. The Catholic Church has the objective truth revealed by God, we have all the means of salvation, however we often fall short of the ideals of our faith. There are people of other faith backgrounds who can be subjectively more holy and virtuous than ourselves. Also, the knowledge that the Catholic faith has a clearer picture of who God is should humble us. The more we have been given, the more that will be expected of us.

To have a lively faith that will influence our lives we need to cultivate certitude and humility.

Faith is a theological virtue. A theological virtue is a virtue which comes from God. It is a gift planted or infused into the soul at baptism, which unites the soul to God and brings it to perfection. God is the cause of faith. God enlightens the mind to believe in Him and what He reveals about Himself. Sadly, we can lose the light of faith by sin. When talking to parents about the Sacraments I normally give the the analogy of a power plug. There are three theological virtues (faith, hope and love), these are like the three prongs of a power plug. The theological virtues plug us into God (our power source). The power of God (Sanctifying Grace) flows through the theological

virtues enabling us to live a life of virtue. God's grace is always present for us to tap into, unless we turn off the switch by sin.

In the *Summa Theologica*, St Thomas Aquinas talks about faith in three levels:

- The first and the most fundamental level of faith is 'Belief in A God'. That is, the belief that God exists, however He may be seen as a distant God who created the universe and then left it to its own devices. This level of faith probably won't affect the way one lives their life.
- The second level of faith is 'BelieVING God'. That is, recognising that his word is the truth. God reveals himself to us. This leads to an intellectual faith that knows about God.
- The third and most profound level of faith is Belief IN God. That is, knowing God exists, recognising His word as truth and accepting His word as a 'rule of life' and the way of salvation. This is the better part that Mary chose. By listening attentively to Christ, Mary was conforming her life to Christ.

This third level of faith impacts our lives and the 'work' we do as Christians. If we want to be welcomed into heaven, it is not enough to believe God exists; it is not enough to believe in what God has revealed; We need to live our faith as a 'rule of life'. The saints are in heaven because they made their faith a 'rule of life' and responded with heroic virtue. The saints are not in heaven because they performed miracles. St James tells us,

"Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. . .

those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not

hearers who forget but doers who act - they will be blessed in their doing.”

(James 1:22-25)

The Work of a Disciple

I now turn to the work of a disciple. If faith is why we do what we do, work is how we put our faith into action. Faith is our ‘rule of life’, and work is our putting that rule of life into action.

Going back to the Gospel passage, Martha was doing an important work for the Lord, but “Martha was *distracted* by her many tasks.” The work of a disciple flows from faith and builds up the faith. If our works ‘distract’ us from the Lord they are not the works of faith. The work of a disciple flows from faith and flows back to strengthen one’s faith in God. Because Martha was distracted, she took her inner gaze off the Lord and put her focus on herself. The work she was doing was good, however it led to her complaining about her sister and look for her own self recognition. “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself?”

A living faith (with the attitudes of certitude and humility) is the foundation of the way we live our faith personally and the work of the various groups within the Church. A living faith gives us the drive we need to perform works and it directs our actions.

What is the work of a disciple? The broadest and most fundamental work of a disciple is the work of charity. The Church exists to continue to witness the love of God. St Thomas Aquinas says,

“If the virtue of faith is to be operative, to be living and active, it must be suffused with charity.”

The work of faith is charity. This work of charity is on two levels, based on the two commandments of love - love of God and neighbour.

The primary work of a disciple is growing in his own personal love of God, and helping others to grow in their love of God. A living and active faith is an ever deepening love, friendship and adoration of God. Without this our works as disciples of Christ would simply become a ‘Not for Profit’ organisation. Showing people the love of God is more important than giving someone money. The first work of the Catenian’s is to build up the love and adoration of God in the lives of it’s members, and through their community to build up the love of God in the parish community. Your friendships and support of each member should encourage holiness in yourselves and your parish community. Going back to the Gospel passage, Mary, who sat at the feet of Jesus listening to Him, was engaged in the primary work of love and adoration of God. This is the primary work of a disciple.

The secondary work of a disciple is love of neighbour. We can’t bring people to the love of God without taking care of their physical needs. Martha loved Christ in this way, even though it was an imperfect love, by providing for His physical needs. St James warns us,

“If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” (James 2:15-17)

St Thomas Aquinas says, the virtue of faith, in a man or woman, is a habit that serves as the principle of doing good acts. St James says something similar,

“Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.” (James 2:18).

As our love of God grows we naturally grow in our desire to serve our brothers and sisters. And vice versa, as we are faithful to this grace and serve others, our love of God grows and our faith is enhanced and alive. A very simple truth is, ‘If you want to be happy, do something good for someone else.’

Faith and Works as a Catenian

Applying this reflection on faith and works to life as a Catenian, each community of the faithful in the Church, such as the Catenians, has a part to play in the mission of the universal Church. Each community helps form its members in the faith and takes the Gospel into the world (in a particular way - through a particular work).

Faith:

Our faith drives us to perform particular acts of charity. The Catenian’s do this by making their primary purpose to establish a network of friends, which enhances their family life, strengthens their Faith and sustains them in difficult times.

The Catenian's are an extension to the parish community by providing a support network of friends based on shared faith. I think this is an important need for our parishes. Faith is spread through friendships. People commonly become a member of the Church through friendships. Friendships are developed through shared interests. Catenian friendships needs to be founded on a shared faith.

Works:

Internal works for your community (Deepening faith of members)

- Monthly meetings (A chance to share your faith and encourage the practice of the faith)
- Social events (strengthen bonds of brotherhood)
- Supporting brothers and families in difficulty or as needs arise.

External works for the wider community (Works of charity)

- Support clergy and vocations.
- Develop young Catholics and help guide they in their career.
- Support various charities
- Making rosaries
- Training catechists

These active works will be fruitful when they flow from the foundation of faith. These works will encourage new members as men see the good fruits flowing from a lived faith as a Catenian. Your community gives you the structure to live the faith well. I conclude short reflection with the words of St Teresa of Calcutta. St Teresa performed tireless work and changed the Church through her deep and profound

faith. A life of simple acts of charity changed the lives of so many people. May we too follow her example as we strive to live a life of faith and works.

“Let us do something beautiful for God.” (St Teresa of Calcutta)