

# Journey of Faith



## In Short:

- Faith is freely given by God.
- Faith, science, and reason coexist.
- Faith grows when we nurture and share it.



- Who or what do you have faith in?



## What Is Faith?

**"Faith** is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen."

Hebrews 11:1

Faith often refers to religious belief, but we can have faith in many things. Faith begins as trust, an essential element in any healthy relationship. As young children, we believed our parents, caregivers, and teachers would provide for our needs and safety. We later extended our faith and trust to friends, classmates, romantic interests, and God.

For Catholics, the most important faith is in God as revealed through Jesus Christ. As we grow in relationship with Jesus, nurture our faith and trust in him, and come to believe in his message, our lives have greater purpose and richness. Faith is our free response to God's loving invitation.

*"By faith, we are able to give our minds and hearts to God, to trust in his will, and to follow the direction he gives us."*

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, p. 37

## What Does Faith Feel Like?

Spiritual longing is part of human nature (CCC 44). Saint Augustine wrote, "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you" (*Confessions* 1.1).

This longing manifests itself differently in each person. For many, it arises as the search for meaning. As we ask fundamental questions—*Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going?*—we may be drawn into deeper reflection and tap into an inner longing for God. These questions challenge our minds, but the mind's answers are insufficient—just as, we discover, are worldly pursuits of personal fulfillment or self-improvement. We are drawn to something more.

This longing for "something more" is the beginning of our response to God's call to relationship—*friendship*—with him. Recall St. Augustine's words: "You have made us for yourself." In other words, it's built into our nature to return to God, our Creator, and to respond to his love with our lives. The *Catechism* tells us, "The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God" (CCC 27).

Does this mean the way of faith is easy? That we won't ever struggle or feel far from God? Closeness to God can't be measured in terms of feelings. God is as near to us when we struggle as when we're full of peace and joy.

Faith in God is a lens through which we see all of life. We find strength in our faith in difficult times, and the joys of life are more meaningful when we recognize them as God's blessings.

*"Although you have not seen him you love him; even though you do not see him now yet believe in him, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, as you attain the goal of [your] faith, the salvation of your souls."*

1 Peter 1:8–9

## Does Having Faith Mean We Don't Question or Doubt?

Asking questions is one way we learn about the world and each other. God places questions within our hearts and minds to draw us closer to him and to his will. God also gives us perception, reason, and conscience to guide us to truth. Faith seeks understanding.

True faith isn't anti-intellectual; it makes full use of the sciences, history, logic, imagination, and emotions. The Catholic Church is so grounded in essential truth that it will support and assist you in exploring your questions. You may not always understand or like the answers, but the Church believes Christ is present in you and your journey.

*"The believer does not seek to understand, that he may believe, but he believes that he may understand."*

St. Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogium*, chapter 1

## The Bible and Faith

The Catholic understanding of faith comes largely from Scripture. The essential message of the many biblical references to faith is that it is a gift freely given by God. Christ walks with everyone who opens his or her heart to him:

*"Through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus."*

Galatians 3:26

*"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God."*

Ephesians 2:8

*"Jesus said... 'Everything is possible to one who has faith.' Then the boy's father cried out, 'I do believe, help my unbelief!'"*

Mark 9:23–24

- How is participation in RCIA a sign of your growing faith?
- In what ways is your faith a gift? Give an example.



## What Is Faith in Action?

For most of us, our faith beginning isn't dramatic. God is like a quiet gardener who knows where the "good soil" lies within us better than we do. God plants the first small seed. But if we want our faith to grow, we have to be active about it.

Once you ask God for the gift of faith, God gives it to you freely. But we can't just ask God to give us the gift of faith and be done with it. We have to nurture the faith he gives us. We can't expect our faith in God to grow if we do nothing. Acting on faith takes practice and courage. We witness faith in action in the lives of others—and in our own choices and behaviors:

- Choosing selfless acts over personal interests
- Acting with good intentions and giving others the benefit of the doubt
- Reaching out to strangers or those with poor reputations
- Engaging in dialogue and civil discourse to determine the greater good and best solutions

Catholics claim these acts as reflections of Jesus. Jesus often said to those he healed or forgave, "Your faith has saved you." In every case, their faith was both internally felt and shown in their actions:

Luke 7:37–47

The woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears

Matthew 8:6–8; Luke 7:2–7

The centurion who told Jesus his servant would be healed at Jesus' word

Matthew 9:20–21; Mark 5:25–28

The woman who touched Jesus' cloak

*"Amen, I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."*

Matthew 17:20

As noted earlier, relying on faith can be active even in the midst of challenges. Everyone goes through times of confusion, doubt, and fear. We may fail to meet expectations or find ourselves trying to control too much. In these moments, we can lean on our faith rather than slip into discouragement or despair.

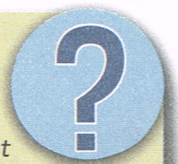
Use these steps to pray your concerns to God:

1. Quiet yourself, trusting in God's loving care. Christ patiently stands at the door of your spirit and knocks, ready to enter and remain with you (Revelation 3:20).
2. Take your problem or dilemma to God in prayer: "God, I give \_\_\_\_\_ to you completely. Help me let go of this obstacle and trust in you."
3. Ask God to help you recognize your part, whether it was good or bad, and to conform your will to his. If a solution is presented, ask God for the strength to cooperate with it.
4. Thank God for his goodness and return to your day ready to accept whatever happens.

• What can you hand over to God this week?

• What are your hopes and fears about this situation?

• What might it mean to let God manage this situation for you?



## How Can We Nurture Our Faith?

### Reading

Reading the Bible and spiritual writings of the saints or contemporary authors helps us resist temptations and inclinations to selfishness. Spiritual reading introduces us to the wisdom of others who have traveled the way of faith.

### Lifestyle

Those with faith grow in God's love and share it with others. When done with faith and hope, spreading the good news of Jesus, practicing good works, and avoiding what's harmful become joys, not burdens.

*"What good is it...if someone says he has faith but does not have works?...If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,' but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead."*

James 2:14–17

- What does your lifestyle say about what you believe?



### Prayer

Spending time together is vital to all relationships. We grow in relationship with Jesus through speaking and listening to him in prayer.

*"Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive."*

Matthew 21:22

### Community Participation

The individual Christian is but one part of the body of Christ, the Church. We need to be open to the gifts God extends to us through his community. We both receive support from its wisdom and abilities and also contribute to its overall unity and strength.

Sharing your faith journey with the RCIA team, your godparent or sponsor, the parish, and the entire Church will help you experience the gift of community and build the support network we all need.



Write down any questions you have about faith, religion, and the Catholic Church. Sometime this week, approach an experienced Catholic, an RCIA team member, or a parishioner—perhaps a potential sponsor—for help in answering those questions. If a question can't be answered immediately or completely, schedule another discussion or ask for contacts and resources that may help.

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