

Living the Spirit  
October 6, 2013  
More about Faith

I have wanted to reflect on the themes connected with the meaning of our faith during this time being observed by the Catholic Church as a Year of Faith. In thinking about how to go about my writing on faith I have prayed that I would be inspired in a particular way to do so. It is for this reason that I came up with the idea that I should reflect on Who God is. This will help us in our life of faith as believers to know about God, and I hope to deepen how we actually know Him. To know Him is to have a relationship with Him. That means that we are united spiritually with our God. We do live the Spirit.

How can we Catholic Christians speak or write about God without thinking of the revelation we have received through the Church? From earliest times the Church has refined its understanding of the inner life or reality of God. It has studied and developed the revealed truths that Jesus taught his followers. We know that God is one, but that He is one God in three divine Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Before I go on to some reflections on the Second Person of the Trinity I would like to write about faith. Faith for us means our belief, our acceptance as true all that God has revealed and the Church teaches. It has as its object those truths that God revealed in the Scriptures and then continued to reveal through the Church's Tradition.

Theologians have developed over time many different ways of studying and teaching about faith. When I came to a study of Faith, there was what is called a tract (a compilation of truths) called "About Faith." That tract began by reminding the student that a theology about faith only developed in an orderly and separate fashion after the reformation. Before that, faith was studied as a part of other tracts of theology. That means it was a part of studying about God as Creator, then as Redeemer, and then as Sanctifier.

We have reflected so far on God as Father and as Creator and as the Provider. We have taken what we know about God and attribute that knowledge to one or other divine Person. Yet we must be careful. I recall how Frank Sheed somewhere in his writings warned that the student of theology must be very careful about the language used.

The language that I learned to use was very much influenced by the vision of St. Thomas Aquinas. It was a time when theology was studied in a way called Neo-Scholasticism. At the same time new ideas with new (but acceptable) insights were coming from the contemporary scene of religious studies. I recall, too, how fascinated I was with the work of a Dutch theologian called Van Noort.

The study of theology has not escaped from misinterpretations in our present times. One thinks of those who floundered in their attempts to make theological truth fit modern culture. Because I am the way I am, I have not found it necessary to revisit my earlier beliefs. I feel secure that my faith is what I have needed as a preacher or teacher of

religious truth. I trust that it is enough for the ultimate goal of any study of God, namely to know Him and be united with Him forever.

In our pursuit of knowledge about God we cannot avoid coming upon what we call Mystery. We must all recognize that God is so great that our poor human minds at their very best will not comprehend Him entirely. Faith will demand that we accept that God is One, and that there are Three Persons in one God. I recall how our dogmatic professor insisted that if we came to a conclusion that we had solved the mystery of the Trinity we would be revealed as in error and had become a heretic.

Many persons simply accept the truths they learn about God and religious truth. They find themselves ready to accept all the analogies that over time dedicated theologians have offered. They see something of truth, and simply accept whatever the Church says it is. That is fine; it may protect from error or difficulty. But how good it is to make an effort to strengthen faith by constant reflection and learning.

In this Year of Faith I have thought that the best reflection would be to know God more. We can do this by thinking. Then we realize that thinking is very hard. We can overcome many limitations as long as we do not forget that faith will always be required. We do this by accepting that our realization of God is not meant to be full or complete in this world or in this life. The great adventure still lies incomplete here. To know God here is to begin a reality of love and in very human ways begin a life that theologians call eternal.

Although there is much more to be said about faith in a general way I must leave that to others. The reader can surely find many sources that will strengthen his or her personal faith. Pope Francis has written his first encyclical letter on this very subject. He used a great deal of what his predecessor had already prepared for a clear statement on this theme. Again, I do not wish here to comment on this special writing of the Holy Father.

Let me share, however, what I recently read on this theme as described by Pope Francis in his Angelus address of August 8. He told Christians about the importance of a deep faith fixed on Christ. He further warned them against a religious life that is only superficial. "To live the faith is not to decorate life with a little religion like a cake that is decorated with a little frosting. No! It's not like that. Faith entails choosing God as a fundamental criterion of life, and God is neither meaningless nor neutral. God is love." The Pope added: "To follow Jesus requires renunciation of evil, of egotism, and choosing good, truth, justice. It also requires sacrifice and a renunciation of self-interest. [Jesus establishes criteria:] 'Live for self or live for God and others; be served or serve; obey self or obey God.' Remember this: Follow Jesus, no one else. To follow Jesus means to be involved, because faith is not something decorative. It is the strength of the soul."

Surely this is what we want to do as followers of Jesus: to be involved in what our faith requires of us. That is how we will grow spiritually into lovely images of God.

*God love you always!*  
*Monsignor David Morrison*