



A Family of Faith: Volume I

October Lecture Notes

COMING TO KNOW GOD: Reason, Revelation, and Faith

Introduction

- I. What Reason tells us about God
- II. What Revelation tells us about God
- III. Faith: Accepting God and His Truth
- IV. Sacred Art Discussion: *The Creation of Adam*

Introduction

- A. Opening Questions
 1. Whom are we most likely to believe?
 2. How about when we are children?
 3. What are some qualities or behaviors others display that make you more likely to believe them?
 4. How do we find someone who is able to do something for us that we cannot do for ourselves? (e.g., doctors, plumbers, dentists, etc.)
- B. Image of a Dance
 1. Imagine a girl is at a formal ball. While she's there, she sees a man across the dance floor. She can't see him too clearly, but she recognizes that there's something special, something unique about this man.
 2. Then imagine the man sees her, and walks across the dance floor towards her. He introduces himself, and asks her to dance.
 3. Finally, imagine she accepts his invitation, and their relationship begins.
- C. These three steps correspond to the three phases of coming to know God
 1. First, we can know about God through our own **reason**. This knowledge isn't very clear, but it's enough to know that God is unique, and the most important thing there is.
 2. Secondly, God comes to introduce Himself directly through **revelation**. He tells us who He is, and invites us into a relationship with Himself.
 3. Thirdly, by **faith**, we accept God's revelation, and our personal relationship with Him begins.

So let's look at those three steps in greater detail

I. What Reason tells us about God

- A. When we talk about "reason" in this context, we're talking about our natural human intelligence.
 1. Our ability to make observations and draw inferences from our common experiences.

- B. Reason can come to know that God exists in *two ways*:
 1. *First: By looking at the external world*
 - a. If the universe had a beginning, what caused that beginning?
 - b. If things in the universe don't have to exist, why *do* they exist?
 - c. How did the universe get to be so orderly and predictable if there was nobody to organize it?

 2. *Second: By looking at the human person*
 - a. Why does everyone want to be perfectly and permanently happy if there is no perfect and permanent happiness?
 - b. Why does everyone want to be in a loving relationship with a perfect person if there is no perfect person?
 - c. A "good" thing is something that achieves the purpose it was given by its maker (e.g., a pen manufacturer makes a pen to write clearly, and it's a good pen if it does that). But then how can we talk about people being "good" or failing to be good unless we were given some purpose by a Maker?

- C. These are all ways that we can know that God exists, and that He is supremely powerful, wise, necessary, etc... So we can know by reason that there is a God, and that He's incredibly important.
 1. But our understanding of Him, just based on reason, is pretty vague. We can't see Him, we can't talk to Him, we don't know where He is.

 2. More importantly, we can know *what* God is, but we can't know *who* God is.

Which is why, if we're going to enter into a relationship with Him, He's going to need to take the initial step. Which He does, in Revelation.

II. What Revelation tells us about God

- A. So God comes to us and introduces Himself. When God reveals Himself directly to the human race, that's called **Divine Revelation**.
 1. It begins in the Old Testament, where God reveals Himself slowly to the patriarchs and prophets.
 2. Then, He reveals Himself *fully* by coming to meet us in the flesh, in Jesus Christ.
 3. But how do we know about Jesus?
 - a. Because the **Magisterium**
= Peter and the Apostles and their successors (the pope and bishops)
 - b. gave us **Scripture (The Bible)**
= the sacred books written, commissioned, and collected by the magisterium
 - c. and **Tradition**
= the official teachings of the Church down through the centuries
- B. Now revelation tells us *who* God is. In fact, it tells us that God is 3 whos or 3 persons
 1. It tells us that God is a **Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit**.
 - a. God is an infinitely happy, loving community of persons
 2. This is the central mystery of our faith. It tells us:
 - a. Who God is
 - b. The kind of relationship we are invited to enter
 3. In other words, the doctrine of the Trinity answers the two ultimate questions:
 - a. Where does everything come from?
 - b. What is the purpose of life?

Now the only question is: will we accept God's invitation to join Him?

III. Faith: Entering into Relationship with God

- A. Faith means first of all: *believing that what God has revealed is true*, and secondly: *acting according to your faith*

1. If you don't believe what God has told you, then you can't be in relationship with Him
2. And if you don't *act* like you believe, then your belief doesn't do you any good.

B. *Believing that what God has told you is true*

1. If you reject somebody's testimony, it means you don't trust them personally – and you can't be in a loving relationship with someone you don't trust.
 - a. That's why accepting God's testimony is so crucial for your relationship with God.
2. Also, don't think that "faith" or "belief in God" mean uncertain opinion
 - a. God can't lie or be mistaken, so you can be absolutely certain that what He reveals through the Bible and Church teaching is completely true.
3. Of course, there's a lot of stuff in the Bible and two thousand years of official Church teaching – but there are plenty of places to find summaries, like the Creeds and the Catechisms.
 - a. That's why there's no reason for any Catholic to be ignorant about the basic truths of faith. There's no reason you shouldn't know about the God who's done so much to make Himself known to you.

C. *Acting according to your faith*

1. A couple who knows they're having a child, but don't do anything to get ready, is in *denial*. Their knowledge isn't doing them any good.
2. So if you know who God is, what He's done for you, and His instructions for your happiness – but you don't do anything about it – what good does it do you?!
3. Over the course of this program, don't forget that all this *information* is meant to lead you deeper and deeper into a *relationship* with God.

Don't keep it at the theoretical level – let it change your life!

IV. Sacred Art Discussion: The Creation of Adam by Michelangelo

- A. Whom do you see in this painting? What part of the Bible does it depict?
 1. Adam is on the left; God the Father is on the right, surrounded by angels. Some scholars believe the woman behind the Father is Eve, yet to be created by Him. The painting depicts the creation of Adam from the Book of Genesis.
- B. Compare and contrast the appearance and posture of God the Father with Adam. Who seems to have more energy?
 1. Allow the discussion about this work of art to go in unexpected directions! You might point out that God the Father seems to have more energy, while Adam appears more passive. This helps us see **God as the Creator**, the one who takes the “initiative step” of love with us. He breathes life into Adam, and into all of us. Everything good comes from God.
- C. Why would Adam’s posture mirror God’s?
 1. Allow discussion to proceed freely. Notice details such as how Adam’s lower right leg and foot are almost an exact replica of the Father’s. Their arms look very similar. Their bodies seem roughly the same size. If parents do not reach this conclusion on their own, point out that the painting helps us understand what it means to be created in the image and likeness of God. Although God the Father is pure spirit and has no body, the artist has painted Him with a human body. This, along with the fact that Adam’s posture somewhat mirrors God’s, helps us understand that **man is created in the image and likeness of God** with intellect, free will, and the capacity to love.
- D. Why do you think Michelangelo painted their hands almost, but not quite, touching?
 1. There is no “right answer” to this question!
- E. Some scholars note that the contours of the image behind God look similar to a human brain. If true, what might that signify?
 1. You might suggest that Michelangelo was emphasizing that God has given human persons an **intellect**.
- F. What other connections can you make between our readings this month and this piece of art?
 1. Allow the conversation to proceed freely.

Discussion Questions

1. As Catholics, we believe faith is God’s gift to us, as well as our free response to God’s gift. How can faith be both God’s gift and our response to it?
 - a. God takes the initiative, but we must choose to respond to Him.
2. God created us with free will – the ability to choose between right and wrong. How does free will connect to the meaning of faith?
 - a. While some Protestant sects teach that grace is irresistible, Catholics believe that people can choose to have faith in God or to reject Him. We can only make that choice if we have free will, which we do.
3. The world sometimes treats people of faith as “blind followers.” Why is that an unfair statement? Why is faith NOT a blind leap?
 - a. Because it is founded on the Word of God, who never lies.
4. Why is placing our faith in God different from placing our faith in any human being?
 - a. Humans can fail, even when they mean well, or try hard not to. God never fails.

5. What are the attributes of God?
 - a. Holy, almighty, all-knowing, eternal and unchanging, omnipresent.
6. Which of his attributes is most awesome to you?
 - a. Accept reasoned answers.
7. A mystery is a truth entirely above our reason, but not contrary to it. We believe it because God has revealed it. Which attribute of God do you believe is most mysterious?
 - a. Accept reasoned answers.
8. How do the attributes of God help us know our faith is certain?
 - a. Since God is holy, He knows everything, and He never changes, we can know we can trust His promises to us.
9. The Trinity is the central mystery of our Faith. This mystery reveals to us the truth that there are three persons in one God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (CCC 261). How would you put the mystery of the Trinity in your own words?
 - a. Accept reasoned answers that include reference to one God in three Divine Persons.
10. How does making the Sign of the Cross connect to the Trinity?
 - a. We name the three Divine Persons of the Trinity.
11. Another way of saying that God is Trinity is that He is a communion of persons. How does this help us know that God is love?
 - a. God Himself is three Persons who love each other. The Trinity is an eternal exchange of life-giving love. God is a family!
12. How can your family be like the Trinity?
 - a. Answers should be based on reflecting unselfish, life-giving love to each other, being open to the gift of new life.
13. What did God create the world out of? Can anyone else create things this way?
 - a. Nothing. No.
14. Humans are created in the image and likeness of God. This does not mean that we look like God. What does it mean?
 - a. It means that, like God, we have intellect, free will, and the capacity to love.
15. God called man very good. The rest of creation was called good. What was the only thing that was not good?
 - a. For man to be alone.
16. What are some things you can discern about who God is by observing His creation?
 - a. Accept reasoned answers that reflect the marvelous nature of Creation, and our own longing for truth, beauty, and goodness.

Reminders and Announcements

- A. The next Community Meeting picnic will take place at **[location]** on **[date]**.
Provide information for your parish

Living the Faith At Home

- A. Put up the **October Fridge Page** and the **Car Conversations hang tag**.
- B. Choose the activities that will work best for your family. For example, some children

may prefer reading and discussion, while others might prefer crafts.

- *You are not required to do all the activities in the book.*

C. Your children will learn the Faith from your witness as parents better than through any structured activity.

1. Fridge page and car conversations can be found in their Parent's Guide at the beginning of this month's lesson.
2. This program is first and foremost about their own formation, and secondarily about helping them teach their children. "Put your own mask on first," as they say!

Key Points in Our Reading This Month

A. Faith is:

- A gift from God
- Necessary for salvation and requires that we follow God's commandments
- Summarized in the Apostles' Creed

B. Faith is not a blind leap.

C. We can know God through Divine Revelation and through His creation.

D. Unlike any other creatures, human beings are made in the image of God. This means we are created with intellect, free will, and the capacity to love.

E. God is the Blessed Trinity – one God in three Divine Persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is the central mystery of our faith.

F. God the Father is the Creator of Heaven and Earth.

Closing Prayer

A. Ask parents to reflect on this quotation for a few moments, and then close in prayer.

"Teaching is not a body of abstract truths. It is the communication of the living mystery of God."

- Pope St. John Paul II

Dear Lord, thank you for the chance to spend time together learning about who You are and what it means to have faith in Your promises. Please help and encourage all the parents in this room, and the ones who could not be here tonight, to help their children come to know You, have faith in You, and love You.