

LESSON

1

“I BELIEVE”

BACKGROUND READING



What Is Faith?

Faith is a gift from God, as well as our free response to believe what God tells us about Himself and about the world He made.

Faith is a gift

If faith is a gift, how do we receive it? We first receive the gift of faith in the Sacrament of Baptism. The Sacraments are the chief means of receiving of God’s grace in our lives. Thus, whenever we properly receive the Sacraments, we receive an increase in our faith. We must also ask God, in prayer, to increase our faith. “The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith!’” (Luke 17:5).

Faith is necessary for salvation. Jesus tells us many times, and the Catholic Church teaches that “Believing in Jesus Christ and in the One who sent him for our salvation is necessary for obtaining that salvation” (CCC 161).

Our faith can be increased, but it also can be lost. We are free to accept or to reject God. We can deny His presence through our fear or doubt, and we can choose to lose His presence by our own mortal sin. God is always calling us to Himself, but He never coerces us. We must

choose to believe in Him and we must live our lives according to His revealed truth.

Faith is a theological virtue

There are three theological virtues – faith, hope, and love. They are called theological virtues because they come from and point us toward God. “Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us, and that Holy Church proposes for our belief, because he is truth itself” (CCC 1814).

Faith is certain

Unlike human beings who sin, or who fail despite their best intentions, God never sins or fails. For this reason, faith is *certain*. We can be surer of our faith in God than we can be in any human knowledge.

Our faith is not a blind leap, even though the truths that have been revealed to us are sometimes not clear to our human understanding. We believe because it is God who has revealed the truth to us. Scripture tells us: “Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1).

Since all human beings can and will fail at one time or another, we would be foolish

to place all our trust in any human being. There is only One in whom we should completely trust – God. God can never fail. He alone is completely trustworthy and faithful.

Faith requires obedience

Jesus told us that those who love Him keep His commandments, and it is true that the appropriate response to authentic faith is to obey. If by faith we believe that God is who He says He is, we must respond to that revelation with lives lived in obedience to the truth that He has revealed. St. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, calls this “the obedience of faith” (Romans 1:5).

By faith “man freely commits his entire self to God.” For this reason the believer seeks to know and do God’s will (CCC 1814).

Faith means the body of truths we believe

Faith also means the body of truths, revealed to us by God, which we believe.

These truths are summarized for us in creeds. The word creed comes from the Latin word *credo*, which means “I believe.”

Creeds, as summaries of our faith, gather together the essential truths that we profess and were originally used as teaching tools for those preparing for Baptism.

In the history of the Church, many professions of faith (creeds) were articulated in response to the different needs of each era. One creed, however, does not supersede or “overrule” another. Rather, each helps us to understand our Faith in a special and deeper way.

One creed has a special place in the life of the Church: the Apostles’ Creed. This creed was not written by the Apostles themselves, but is a faithful summary of their Faith. The Apostles’ Creed is used at Baptism and is the basis of the *Catechism’s* presentation of our profession of faith.

LESSON 2

IN GOD, THE FATHER, THE ALMIGHTY

BACKGROUND READING



We can come to know and to believe in the existence of God through reason, through Divine Revelation, and through God's creation.

We can know God through reason

Reason alone is not sufficient to know and love God, but we can know that He exists through reason. Faith and reason do not contradict each other. Rather, our intellect and wills cooperate with divine grace. In fact, the word *theology* means faith seeking understanding. The *Catechism* teaches that although we can be certain of God through reason, there is greater knowledge that comes to us only through Divine Revelation. We can know Divine Revelation through the Word of God in the Bible, and through the Tradition of the Church Jesus founded.

We can know God through Divine Revelation

Because it was God's will that we would come to know Him, to love Him, and to live with Him eternally in Heaven, He has gradually revealed Himself to mankind.

Salvation History is filled with the stories of God's mercy and His covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. The fullness of this revelation would come to mankind in the person and mission of Jesus Christ, His only Son.

"He has made known to us the mystery of His will in accord with His favor that He set forth in Him as a plan for the fullness of times, to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth" (Ephesians 1:9-10).

This revelation has been preserved for us, and for all generations, through the Sacred Scriptures and Sacred Tradition guarded by the magisterium (teaching authority) of the Church. Regularly spending time with God in prayer, hearing the Word of God at each Holy Mass, and receiving the Sacraments – especially Confession and Holy Communion – will help you grow in your understanding of Divine Revelation.

The Blessed Trinity is the central mystery of our Faith

We often think that the word *mystery* means something unknowable or a problem to be solved. But *mystery* means something

different when we talk about the mystery of God or the mysteries of Christ's life. The teachings of the Church are sometimes called the mysteries of the Faith; we even proclaim the Mystery of Faith at Mass, and the Seven Sacraments of the Church are sometimes called the Holy Mysteries. But in no way are we saying that any of these things are problems to be solved or that they are unknowable. Quite the opposite, in fact. Who God is, the divinity of Jesus, and the truths of our Faith, which are invisible, spiritual realities, are revealed and made known to us through visible signs and symbols.

The Blessed Trinity – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – is the central mystery of our Faith. When we speak of the Blessed Trinity, we are professing two beliefs: belief in the unity of God (that there is only one God) and belief in the Trinity of God (that there are three equal, distinct Divine Persons in God). When we say that there are three distinct Persons in God we mean that one Person is not the other Person, and yet all three are one God.

The Trinity is a communion of persons – an eternal exchange of love. God is a family, and God's family life is life-giving love. When we are baptized, we enter this family as God's adopted children. We become partakers of the divine life of God and are called to enter into loving communion in this world as a sign and witness to the divine communion existing in the Trinity.

The word Trinity does not appear in the Bible, but the Lord clearly speaks to us about this truth. One of the clearest examples is in Matthew 28:19, when Jesus tells His disciples, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in

the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

We can know God through His creation

The story of God's wonderful plan for all mankind begins in Genesis 1. The account of creation answers for us the most basic questions that people ask in life: where do we come from, and where are we going?

Through creation, we can see and know that there is a God. St. Paul speaks of this truth when he says, "For what can be known about God is evident to them, because God made it evident to them. Ever since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what He has made. As a result, they have no excuse" (Romans 1:19-20).

The human person also attests to the existence of God. Within ourselves we find truth, beauty, goodness, and a longing for that which is eternal. In this man senses his spiritual soul – a soul that could be created only by an eternal One who is all truth, all beauty, and all goodness.

In the story of Creation we learn that, unlike any other living thing, human beings are made in the image of God. This does not mean that we look like God. Rather, it means we are created with intellect, free will, and the ability to love. God called man *very good*. (The rest of creation was called *good*.) The only thing that God said was *not good* was for man to be alone – the understanding that led God to create Eve (Genesis 2:18). Man and woman were made for another, to love one another. In this way, the Christian family is a reflection of the self-giving love of the Trinity.