

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time



Saint John Henry Newman, a well-known 19th-century theologian and poet, noted that faith is the reasoning of a mind preoccupied with God. Over the past several weeks, our reflections have highlighted ways in which we reorder our lives around God in recovery. The rationale behind our actions and new attitudes is constructed around experience, strength, and hope shared by others. Another word we can use to describe this exploration is trust.

Saint Paul reveals more about faith and trust in this Sunday's second reading as he begins, "Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Paul then describes a variety of biblical examples of faith, citing Abraham's willingness to offer up his son Isaac and others who found the promises of God trustworthy.

After giving specific examples (much like the testimonies we hear in recovery meetings), Paul shares the common link among those who have entrusted God with their lives (Hebrews 11:13-16):

*They did not receive what had been promised
but saw it and greeted it from afar
and acknowledged themselves to be strangers and
aliens on earth,
for those who speak thus show that they are seeking
a homeland.
If they had been thinking of the land from which
they had come,
they would have had opportunity to return.
But now they desire a better homeland, a heavenly
one.
Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their
God,
for he has prepared a city for them.*

In our journey of recovery, we are given a similar opportunity to seek God. What we go searching for, we go searching with. More continues to be revealed to us, and the opportunity to return to our past is always available. However, since getting a taste of freedom and a life ordered around God, we have no intention of going back to the empty ways of old.

In this sense, we can consider ourselves blessed to know the inevitable darkness of a life void of faith. We trust that God can do for us what we could not do for ourselves. We put our trust in the faithfulness of our Lord, who has walked by our side regardless of our fidelity to Him. We also recognize that faith does not leave us idle but calls upon us to take action.

As our experience of living life on God's terms increases, we become more sure of ourselves. It may be easier to know what God's will is *not* and a little more difficult knowing exactly what God's will is for us. Our challenge does not lie in perfectly predicting what God would have us do in every moment, but in remaining willing to see Christ in all things. This is nearly impossible to do when we're focused on what we can get out of all things—an approach that is sure to leave us unfulfilled.

Perhaps faith and trust are best summarized by Thomas Merton, whose prayer captures the essence of trust and surrender:

“My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end, nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.”

Reflection Questions

- How do the shared experiences of others in recovery strengthen your faith or encourage you to take action?
- Describe why and/or how you trust God.
- How does the desire to please God spill into all aspects of your life?

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Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Wisdom 18:6-9

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 33:1, 12, 18-19, 20-22

Second Reading: Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19

Gospel: Luke 12:32-48