

expression that leaves us with an incorrect idea of the reality. Since language is one of the major factors in shaping our consciousness, we must be careful to correct such misconceptions.

In reality, faith is a verb because faith is manifested only in action. The word "faith" describes "faithing" acts, just as grace describes gracious acts. We act in a certain way because of our faith. Rather than saying, for example, that someone "has" faith, we should more correctly speak of a "faithing" person. Rather than saying that someone has "lost" the faith, we should more correctly say that they have "stopped faithing." "Losing the faith" always involves a free choice; what actually happens is that we make a conscious decision to no longer "faith" actively. For us to use faith as a verb in this manner is linguistically ugly, but it would certainly be more accurate and would focus our attention on the fact that faith is active and dynamic, not merely a static possession.

3. Active Expression of Faith

Faith, then, is an essential component of the active expression in our daily life of our relationship with God. The other active components are hope and love. As we shall see, these three virtues – faith, hope and love – are inextricably bound together. A faith-relationship is also a hope-relationship and a love-relationship. When referring to our relationship to God, some people prefer to speak of this relationship as the spiritual life. They envision it, therefore, as a relationship between God, who is Spirit, and the very inner principle of our own being, our "soul," which is also spirit. Pursuing this line of thought has led to the tendency to separate a "spiritual" life from ordinary human or moral life: that is, the way one normally acts in the world. Thus, if we want to be close to God, we must become more and more "spiritual," less "worldly." We must become less concerned with mere human things and more oriented towards the "spiritual," the "otherworldly." Put another way, what we do at Eucharist on a Sunday has little or no relationship with what we do during the rest of the week.

An extreme form of this type of thinking is well illustrated by the following story, as related by Thomas Day. Day was told by a retired F.B.I. agent about the interrogation of Joseph Valachi, a vicious Mafia criminal who turned government informer in the 1960s. Valachi told the interrogators about a particular Mafia chieftain who was old, gentlemanly, self-educated and, according to rumour, an ex-seminarian. This don gave Valachi and an associate the job of rubbing out one of his competitors (whom we shall call Mario), but they failed. They returned to the don's house to ask for an extension on the contract. The old don was very understanding when he heard their story, and he gave them another week to accomplish their task. "By the way," he added, "did you boys go to Mass today?" (It was Sunday.) Why, no, said Valachi (who had no use for religion), they had been too busy trying to rub out Mario. The old man shook his head.

"Rubbing out Mario is important for business," he said, "but going to Mass is important for your soul."¹²

The tendency to separate the "material," the "worldly," the "moral" from the "spiritual" has plagued the religious life of many Christians down through the centuries. We express our faith and develop our relationship with God in and through the way we go about the everyday business of living. A well-lived human life of faith involving the whole person – intellect, will, emotions, desires – is also a spiritual life. As one commentator on Celtic spirituality puts it, the spiritual person is the person who feels at home in both worlds.

Faith in Daily Life

Let us now take a look at how we express our faith in our daily life and so develop our relationship with God. Here we shall take as our guide the schema proposed by Thomas Groome.¹³

1. Believing

"Faith" and "belief" are frequently confused in popular understanding and usage. They are not necessarily the same thing. Faith enlightens us so that we can see God revealed in the midst of human life, at the heart of our human experience. We interpret our faith (that is, our way of perceiving God) and we articulate it more clearly by a series of beliefs. A belief, therefore, is a clear and precise articulation, in a specific instance, of our much broader commitment of faith in God who is present to our life. Examples of such beliefs are the belief that Jesus is both God and man, the belief in the real presence of Christ in the eucharist, the belief in the Assumption of Mary, the belief in the church as the Mystical Body of Christ. Thomas Groome expresses it well:

That Christianity makes certain historical, moral and cognitive claims and proposes them to people as a way of making meaning in their lives is beyond doubt. The activity of Christian faith, therefore, requires, in part, a firm conviction about the truths proposed as essential beliefs of the Christian faith.¹⁴

Believing, therefore, is an aspect of faith, a way of expressing faith. As mentioned earlier, in English we use faith almost exclusively as a noun. When we need a verb to express faith, we use "believe." In its early and original meaning, to believe signified "to hold dear," "to prize," "to give allegiance," "to be loyal to"; therefore it is not merely an act of the mind but of the whole person.

¹² Adapted from Thomas Day, *Why Catholics Can't Sing* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), p. 115.

¹³ See Groome, *Christian Religious Education*, pp. 57-66.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

In present English usage, however, to believe usually refers to something cognitive, engaging principally the mind, the intellect, the rational part of us. As we noted above, on a purely natural, non-religious level all human believing involves accepting certain situations and outcomes for which there is no adequate "proof." Believing means that we accept things that we do not fully grasp or control, even though we do not have scientific certainty. Believing requires a certain submission of the mind.

The same applies to religious believing. We believe, for example, that Jesus is really present in the Eucharist despite the fact that the evidence of our senses indicates that there is nothing there but bread and wine. Why do we believe these religious truths? We believe them, in the first place, because God has revealed them to us and we believe that God is gracious, loving and cannot deceive us (CCC 156). Second, we believe these truths because believing them makes a difference to our lives, makes life more meaningful and helps us to cope with life better. As the great theologian Karl Barth has said: "If a man believes and knows God, he can no longer ask, 'What is the meaning of my life?' But by believing he actually lives the meaning of his life." That bit of advice is worth repeating and emphasizing. Religious believing is an active element in living our religious life. And that brings us to the next dimension of active faith: faith as trusting.

2. Trusting

As we have seen, believing faith is always a "leap in the dark." We believe, even though we do not have all the evidence that would produce certainty. In fact, if we do have absolute certainty about some particular thing, then we cannot have faith in that thing. For example, if I know with certainty that it is two o'clock in the afternoon I cannot have faith in that. If, on the other hand, someone tells me that it is two o'clock in the afternoon and I believe it to be so, then, ultimately, I believe it because I trust that the other person is not deceiving me. Trust is the basis of all faith, as the following story illustrates.

A man came out from a supermarket and saw that the side of his car had been badly dented. He was only somewhat relieved when he saw a note under his windshield wiper. The note read: "Dear Sir, I have just bumped into the side of your car. The people who saw me do this are still watching, and they believe that I am now leaving my name and address on this piece of paper. But they are wrong."

What does it mean to trust? At its simplest and most fundamental psychological level, to trust someone means that we must relinquish control, we must let go, we must stop managing things and let someone else do it. If you have ever

been in a car with a back seat driver, you will understand what this means. There are some people who simply cannot trust another driver to drive well.

Why are we afraid to trust? Precisely because we are afraid. We are afraid of an accident, afraid of being hurt, afraid of being blamed for someone else's mistakes, afraid of losing the esteem of our peers or of the boss, afraid of losing our property, afraid of being conned in business, afraid of death. Yes, we are afraid of death: that is the bottom line. All the other fears are just small ways of dying. They are ways of being deprived of things we hold dear – health, wealth, reputation, a loved one. When we lose the things we are attached to, a little bit of us dies. If we read any of the numerous books and articles on death and dying, we shall find the author making the point that to attain some form of peace and serenity, the dying person must agree to let the world go on without them. We have to agree to give up managing our own affairs, we have to agree to let someone else take control, we have to trust someone to look after our future. For us Christian believers, that someone to whom we surrender is God. As death approaches, we shall have to make the ultimate act of trust. As Jesus said on the cross, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46).

Trusting is an intrinsic part of believing. Many of us can remember the time when, as a child unable to swim, we were encouraged to jump into a swimming pool because there was some adult there to catch us. We believe God, for we trust that God will not deceive us; he loves us, is faithful to us, and will look after us. Because we trust, we have the confidence to throw ourselves into the arms of God, who will not let us drown. When Jesus called upon Peter to walk on the water (Mt 14:29), it was Peter's trust that failed him, until he called out, "Lord, save me!"

It is interesting to note that the English word "faith" is derived from the Latin *fidere*, meaning "to trust." Trusting belongs to the heart, to the emotions. To say to someone "I believe you" is to say that we accept what the other person has told us as being correct, or true, even though we ourselves have not checked it out. But to say to someone "I believe in you" is to convey a deep, personal trust, an expression of confidence born of a loving relationship. It is because we believe in God that we accept God as our Lord, our creator, the giver of life, the one whom we reverence, wonder at, are grateful to and seek a close union with. It is our trusting faith that leads us to pray from the heart, seeking to cement our relationship with the God who has been called by the poet Francis Thompson "This Tremendous Lover."

Odd as it may sound, the truth is that we shall learn to trust God more, the more we learn to trust one another. What does that mean? We must begin to look at any experience of human trust as an experience of trusting God. We have to

learn to see God as an integral part of every facet of our life. To trust is an essential aspect of love; loving and trusting must go together, just as "faithing" and trusting must go together. As we are told in the gospel, we can only learn to love God by learning to love one another. Similarly, we can only learn to trust God if we learn to trust one another.

3. Doing

It is possible, though not probable, that someone may overemphasize the trusting dimension of faith. Overemphasis on trust would tend to make us believe that all we need to do in life is to trust God. Ultimately, such an attitude implies, God will accomplish everything. We really don't have to worry about anything, or even do anything, just leave it all to God.

Admirable as such sentiments may be, we instinctively know that there is more to faith than that. We have to work with God, we have to cooperate with God in an active manner in and through the very fabric of our everyday life. St. Augustine makes the point in one of his oft-cited aphorisms: God, who made us without ourselves, will not save us without ourselves.

There is a well-known story of a man who always had complete trust in God. After many days of rain, the river was about to flood its banks and all the residents in the area were warned to seek higher ground. The man ignored the warning because he was certain that God would not let this happen to him. As the flood waters rose, the man climbed to the upstairs part of his house. A boat came by taking off people who, like himself, had left it too late to leave. He refused a ride in the boat because he was certain that God would help him. As the water rose further, he climbed on to the roof of his house, at which point a helicopter, rescuing the few remaining survivors, came by and lowered a rope for him. No, he said, God would look after him. And, in time, he drowned.

The man arrived in heaven and, being very angry at the way he had been treated, complained to St. Peter that God had let him down despite his great faith and trust. St. Peter replied: "Did we not give you ample warning to seek higher ground? And did we not send a boat to collect you when you did not heed the first warning? And then did we not even send a helicopter for you? It seems to me that we really did answer your prayers!" According to the old Danish proverb, "In the storm pray to God, but keep rowing!"

To cooperate with God in an active manner is to act on our faith in the midst of our Christian life. But the crucial question is this: How can we know what God asks of us – what must we do? To answer this question we must look to the life of Jesus, his teaching about how we should live, and his active promotion of the kingdom of God. His message to us is that we can only love God by loving one

another. This active love of one another manifests itself in active work to help establish the kingdom of God on earth.

The kingdom of God is a kingdom of justice – we must help to promote justice in all its forms and we must try to eradicate injustice, discrimination, dishonesty, deceit, insincerity, and cheating. The paramount importance of promoting justice was emphasized by the Synod of Bishops gathered in Rome on November 30, 1971. "Action on behalf of justice," they say, "and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of preaching the gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation."

The kingdom of God is a kingdom of peace – we must become peacemakers, seeking to reconcile those who are enemies, those who are fighting or feuding, those who are alienated and angry.

The kingdom of God is a kingdom in which there is no hurt or suffering – we must seek to alleviate suffering in whatever way we can. We must minister to the sick, the injured, the disabled, the aged, the bereaved, the hungry, the homeless.

The kingdom of God is a kingdom of love. Its headline is the love of Jesus, who says to us, "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12).

The principle of an active faith is a constant theme in the New Testament, but perhaps nowhere more clearly than in the Letter of James. It is worth quoting the passage:

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. . . . You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. . . . For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead. (Jas 2:14-17, 24, 26)

From all this it should be evident that we cannot call ourselves "faithing" people if we *do nothing* about our faith. In fact, we can say without hesitation that there is no such thing as a non-practising believer. A non-practising believer is a contradiction. True faith is a blending of all the dimensions we have mentioned; it is active believing, trusting and doing. No one dimension is more important than any other; all three must be present. Faith, when all is said and done, is a way of living. Christian faith finds its expression in a truly Christian lifestyle. The faith-filled life is a thoroughly moral life, a spiritual life.