

TEXT: Lectionary readings
THEME: Peace be with you
SUBJECT: Faith
TITLE: Faith

Second Sunday of Easter
11 April 2021
Messiah Moravian
Jerry Harris

Faith is a gift. Fear, not doubt, is faith's antonym. Doubt is an invitation to a deeper experience, a more enlightened understanding, and a greater perseverance in the practice of faith.

Faith is a gift. We can dispose ourselves to receive it by sharing what we have with those in need (Acts 4:32-35), by living together in unity (Psalm 133), by being responsible for our ideas and actions (1 John 1:1-2:2), and by expressing our doubts (John 20:19-31). We dispose ourselves to receive the gift of faith by embracing, not by refusing or rejecting, our mysterious, contingent, spiritual reality hidden in the very mystery of God.

What is faith? Faith is not merely the acquiescence of the mind in certain *truths*, it is the gift of our whole being to *Truth itself* (Thomas Merton). Faith demands an interior revolution of one's whole life and a reorientation of one's existence. Faith is not the acceptance of God as a convenient hypothesis which makes the cosmos seem intelligible, but as the center and meaning of all existence, and more particularly of one's own life.

Faith as portrayed in the New Testament and as practiced in the early church is the willingness to sacrifice every other value rather than the basic value of truth and life in Christ. Christian faith is not acceptance of "truths about" Christ, but following Christ in the way of the cross, the way of sacrificial love.

The reading from Acts confronts us with, perhaps, the greatest challenge to faith, a far greater challenge than any intellectual doubts we may hold about dogma. *Now the whole group of those who **believed** were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. **There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them, and the proceeds of what was sold was distributed to each as any had need.***

There is enough for everyone! That is the incredible message of this story. We are not being told some historical tale about "the golden age" of the first Christians long ago. This is the disclosure of real, possible ways of living for us today, says Jürgen Moltmann, Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology at the University of Tübingen. This is, he says, the "original Christian communism."

You can understand why faith demands an interior revolution of one's whole life and a reorientation of one's existence. How can there be enough for everyone when we know from the very beginning men and women and especially children have lived with want, with anxiety in

their hearts and fear at their backs? Is a community where no one is needy possible or just a beautiful dream?

Our economy is based on wants. The race between growing demand and never-quite-adequate supply is a race that can never be won. Our wants are limitless, the earth's resources are not. The more we have, the more we want, the more the earth is impoverished. Our appetite is endless, never to be satisfied.

Consciously and unconsciously we are dominated by fear: there isn't enough so grab all you can now. "You only live once." The hunger for pleasure, for possessions, for power; the thirst for recognition through success and admiration are signs of our godlessness. "The person who loses God makes a god of him/herself," says Moltmann.

The fear that there is never enough shatters every human community and rouses one nation against another, and in the end everybody against everybody else, and everyone against his or her own self. "There is never enough" is fear's slogan. This fear makes people lonely and leads them into a world which is in principle hostile. "Every man for himself."

"Those who believed were of one heart and soul." Faith builds up communities of manageable size, and strengthens our sense of the life we share with one another and for one another. The opposite of poverty, Moltmann assures us, is not property but community. In community we become rich: rich in friends, rich in neighbors, rich in colleagues, rich in brothers and sisters. Together, as a community, we can help ourselves in most of our difficulties.

What the author of 1 John asks from his readers is not belief, intellectual assent, but fellowship, a fellowship that is ultimately communion with the Father and the Son, communion with the Trinity itself. Joining a fellowship, commitment to a community, involves more than assent to its beliefs, but a sharing in its way of life, in its ceremonies and customs and practices. Such participation in life together is how we dispose ourselves to receive the gift of faith.

God is light, says John, and in him there is no darkness. If we say we have communion with God while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not *do* what is true; but if we walk in the light as God is in the light, we have communion with one another. Justice is our guiding light. Justice ensures that everyone receives "as each has any need"—no less, no more.

Fear hides in the dark; faith walks in the light. Fear prefers the quick profit; faith plants sequoias. Fear loves security; faith risks vulnerability. Fear refuses to trust what it cannot see; faith sees the invisible. Fear believes death has the last word; faith knows God has the last word. Fear isolates and dominates the soul; faith liberates the soul. Fear practices hostility; faith practices resurrection.

At the heart of the gospel, at the heart of reality, lies the inextricable bond connecting our relationship with God to our relationship with our neighbor. Learning to live together in unity disposes us for knowing the unity that is already ours in God.

If St. Thomas placed his fingers in the wounds of the risen Christ, it was less to still his doubts than because there are moments when life has been so plundered and its presence so searing that one can only fall silent—and touch with the lightest finger-tips the glorious body of one's neighbor. (Christian Bobin)

PRAYER: St Isaac of Nineveh died 700
“The Measure of His Mercy”

As a grip of sand is
 flung into the sea,
so do the sins of all flesh
 enter the mind of God.

Just as the strength of a flowing spring
 is not hindered by a handful of earth,
so the compassion of the Creator is not daunted
 by the wickedness of His creatures.
Know this: whoever bears a grudge when he prays
 is like a man who sows grain in the sea
 and expects to reap a harvest.
Regardless, just as the fire's flames
 cannot be prevented from reaching upwards,
so the prayers of the compassionate
 will not be kept from their ascent.