

Father Albert Shamon

A Word for Sunday



Sunday Readings: (R3) Luke 17:5-10; (R1) Habakkuk 1:2-3, 2:2-4; (R2) 2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14.

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." What did they mean? What is faith?

Faith is not just agreeing to statements. Such agreement is creedal faith. It makes the believer. The apostles weren't talking about this kind of faith. Rather, they were talking about faith as agreeing with a way of life. This type of agreement is personal faith. It makes the believer a religious person.

Faith, of course, presupposes revelation. God's revelation — which makes faith possible — was a way of life. This way of life was realized in Jesus of Nazareth. He lived a human life in a special way for all to see. Others saw this life, and it was indeed a "revelation" to them. They never thought a person could live the way He did. And yet, they saw this happening right before their eyes. That was why some began to "believe;" that is, they began to live as He did, or began trying to do so. His way was not easy. Something Jesus was telling them to do prompted the request, "Increase our faith."

Jesus had just been talking about forgiveness. He had been telling the apostles to forgive those who injured them — not just once or twice, mind you, — but every single time someone asked for forgiveness. Seventy times seven times. Wow! Who can do that? Therefore, they asked, "Increase our faith." Help us to live this way of life. For them, faith was agreeing to a way of life.

Therefore, a living faith is a highly personal one. Faith is me, believing — believing in God's love for me, me, me!

Faith must involve me — each one of us. It is as personal as one's birthday or being born. It is a personal discovery, like Andrew's "We've have found the Messiah." Or, like the disciples at Emmaus after the scales had dropped from their eyes. It's an expression of wonderment like that of the blind man who exclaimed, "Now I see!"

Faith is me, believing! In other words, faith is a process, like growing up. Process is an "ing" word, an ongoing thing. It is seeking and finding, planting

and reaping, opening to life and discovering; it is dying and rising. It can always be increased. "Increase our faith."

Faith is me, believing in something! There is a difference between "believing" and "believing in." We "believe" a truth. Such belief addresses the intellect. But we "believe in" a person. Faith is a commitment to a person. When the Reformers reduced faith to an emotional experience, the Church reacted by stressing the intellectual side of faith — as accepting statements revealed by God.

Faith, therefore, is me believing in — not just God — but in God's love for me personally. He loves me and invites me to become friends with Him. Friendship, too, is a process of continuous growth. "Increase our faith," therefore, can be an appeal not only for help to walk in His way, but also for a deepening of our friendship with Him, who is the way.

To sum up, creedal faith is agreeing or accepting statements; personal faith is accepting a way of life. One originates in public revelation — the Christ event; the other originates from a private illumination from within — the grace of God. Creedal faith is static; personal faith is capable of increase. Creedal faith is the theological virtue; personal faith is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. One addresses the intellect; the other addresses one's entire way of life.

Fervently and frequently, therefore, we all ought to take as our own the prayer of the apostles: "Lord, increase our faith."

Yes, increase our faith, Lord, lest we merely accept the statements revealed by you and do no more; lest we become a people who honors you with our lips only, but with hearts far from you.

Yes, Lord, increase our faith; stir into flame this gift of God that we may be strong, loving, wise — unashamed of our faith and unafraid of the hardships its practice might entail.

Yes, increase our faith, Lord, that we may not harden our hearts to your voice; that being just, because of our faith, we shall live your way — the way of truth that leads to life. Amen.

Father Paul J. Cuddy

On the Right Side



If one has a sense of humor, some of the real tragedies in the Church can be taken a bit as we take Archie Bunker — adapted to priests. A woman I have never met wrote: "Recently when I visited a nearby church I started to talk to the priest after Mass, saying that I was thinking of starting back to church. I have not gone with any regularity for 15 years. What was his response? He told me to see the secretary to make arrangements for envelopes. If through your column and discussions with fellow priests, you could put in a word for personal attention to strangers, perhaps a few less sheep would wander. Maybe my ego needs are too great, but I was really angry at this priest's response."

And, marvelling at the fact that the Church is guided by the Holy Spirit, I wrote: "I suppose I know as many priests intimately as the average priest, and quite candidly I know few who are ready for canonization. You recall the requirements for canonization: superlative virtue, undoubted orthodoxy, a couple of miracles. Nevertheless, most of the priests I know are really very good men, more concerned about their people than their people realize. But as with all men, good and bad; we priests have our faults and sins. The seven deadly sins — pride, covetousness, lust, anger, envy, gluttony and sloth — do not cease to struggle within priests at the time of ordination. Most priests I know recognize their weaknesses and sins, regret them, go regularly to confession in penitence; and occasionally even conquer some of their sins. Think how frightening it would be to be unconscious of any personal sins or failures! Sins and failures do tend to keep priests humble.

"Your Father Envelope Pusher may be as insensitive as Archie Bunker. But I think most people consider Archie not so much as being malicious but as being just a plain thickhead. It would be my guess that Father Envelope Pusher is a fair administrator, who keeps the church in good repair, the plumbing working, the bills paid. His sermons probably are pretty dull, but orthodox. He probably regards his assistant quizzically, and vice versa. He may have

a highball before supper, and perhaps spends more time watching the ball games than keeping abreast of theology or reading learned books. In his own way, as thickheaded as he may be, he is sincerely concerned about the whole parish and serves his people conscientiously.

"What is hard for some people is to realize that a priest has to be concerned about the whole parish. Few priests have the gift of special attention to each individual, though the late Father Thomas Connors is still remembered as one such.

"Frankly, I abhor the mentality that equates the Church with the priest. I am a Catholic because I believe with my whole being that Christ established the historic, visible Catholic Church as His living presence on earth, 'to teach, to govern, to sanctify and to save all men.' So says the catechism. So affirms the Council of Trent. So affirms the Vatican Council's document on 'The Church.' If most priests, bishops and theologians were thugs and overbearing and pleasure-loving — thank God they are rare today, though history indicates we've had them by the barrel (I just read the life of St. Catherine of Siena by the Irish Medieval scholar Alice Curtaigne, and by comparison with the 14th century, our days are tranquil, yet the Church continued) — I should still love the Church and claim her as my Mother, my Teacher, my Family, my Home, and as Christ's Mystical Body.

"Consider St. Thomas More. He succeeded that dreadful Cardinal Wolsey as chancellor of England. He knew Wolsey inside and out for what he was: brilliant, able, ambitious, avaricious, power-hungry, worldly. Because he died before Henry VIII declared himself head of the Church in England, Wolsey died a Catholic rather than an Anglican. Had he lived, he surely would have capitulated to his earthly king. Yet Thomas More, with full knowledge of the iniquities of this churchman and others like him, went cheerfully to the block rather than apostatize. He loved the Church, and I hope you will love her too."

Obituary

Mrs. Madeleine L. Tierney, at St. Ann's Home

Madeleine L. Tierney died Sunday, September 14, 1986, at St. Ann's Home, Irondequoit. Mrs. Tierney was 78.

She was the mother of Sister Roberta Tierney, director of the diocesan Division of Education.

In addition to Sister Roberta, Mrs. Tierney is survived by two other daughters, Joan

DeLaus and Nancy Thornell of California; a sister, Rose Meyer; and several grandchildren and great grandchildren.

The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated on Tuesday, Sept. 16, in the chapel of St. Ann's Home by Bishop Matthew H. Clark. Homilist for the Mass was retired Bishop Joseph L. Hogan. Burial was at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery that day.

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Elmira native to profess vows to Rochester Mercy congregation

Sister Rita Lewis will profess her first vows as a Sister of Mercy Sunday, October 5, at the Mercy motherhouse, 1437 Blossom Road.

Sister Rita, 30, is the daughter of Gerald Lewis Sr. and the late Gladys Lewis of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Elmira. A registered nurse, she works at the Andrew Center, a foster care home operated by the congregation, and at Heritage Christian Home in Henrietta.

She will profess her vows at a Eucharistic liturgy celebrated by Father Paul McCabe, pas-

tor of Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Elmira. The liturgy begins at 2 p.m.

Volunteer clerks needed

The Genesee Valley Office of Social Ministry is looking for volunteer clerks for the Rochester Psychiatric Center's gift shop. The position would be for one or more weekday afternoons from noon to 4:30 p.m.

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