

COLUMNISTS

Seeking understanding of our faith

Socrates once encouraged people to reflect on their lives. His statement, "The unexamined life is not worth living," rings true to all who have probed their lives in quest of deeper meaning and more mature understanding of life.

We can make a parallel in the realm of faith. Perhaps we might pronounce a sentence like, "The unexamined faith is not worth believing." From the time of Jacob's wrestling with the angel in Genesis 32, believers have pressed on for deeper understanding of their faith. In fact, there is a sense in which we are all theologians — people pressing to know more about the God they worship.

The push for deeper understanding and appreciation of what our beliefs mean begins early in our lives, and continues through our entire lifetime. "Faith seeking understanding" is the definition that St. Anselm gave for theology itself, and every single believer finds that his and her faith seeks for deeper understanding all the time.

Most often it is our experience itself that gives rise to the kind of questioning that demands deeper reflection on God and our relationship with God. It is the connection between everyday experiences and the beliefs we hold that leads to the doing of "theology," whether per-



the moral life

By PATRICIA SCHOFFLES, SSJ

formed in our own heads and hearts, or in formal theological classrooms.

An incident from my own experience illustrates this fact of "faith seeking understanding." Since this particular experience involves a small child, I'm led to believe that those who are parents must have a whole repertoire of similar stories!

I once brought a kite to my small niece, who was only about 5 years old at the time. Even though there was not even the slightest hint of a breeze that day, this little kid insisted that we try to fly that kite. So, armed with rags tied into a "tail," about 100,000 feet of twine, and the assembled kite itself, we climbed a hill near her house and tried to get the thing aloft.

At one point I was left to do the major

work of the project. Meeting with little success, I glanced around to see what my small "partner" was up to. I was surprised to see her standing apart at some distance, bent over with her eyes closed and her hands folded in a kind of prayer posture.

When I asked her what she was doing, she looked up at me and asked somewhat impatiently, "Does God know we're trying to fly this kite?"

I've been through some serious theology courses in my life, but on that day I knew I was caught. If I answered, "No," I would be depriving God of "omniscience" — knowing everything. But if I answered, "Yes," I might be implying that God didn't care about our effort (which by then had been considerable, at least by my estimate).

I got around the dilemma that day by explaining that there might be a robin somewhere trying to build a nest, and God was keeping the wind still to help that poor little robin, whose chore was more important than our kite flying. (It was, by my own accounting, a pretty weak response.)

The incident has become an illustration for me of the fact that we all question the meaning of our faith. Even more, it is through the examination of our beliefs in the light of what happens

to us in the experience of our daily life that we move to a deeper appropriation of who God is and who we are in relation to God. If we never have questions, if we never wonder about how God is affected by what happens to us, if we never "struggle with God" like Jacob did, maybe we're not letting our faith live enough.

In our moral lives, too, our faith leads us to move constantly to deeper appreciation of how our character and our decisions inform our relationship with God. Our "deepest core and sanctuary, where we are alone with God," our conscience, is the locus of the moral life. Our continual quest to make our entire life into a response to God's love for us means that the questions we put to our faith convictions because of the experiences can actually become a source of growth for us.

Today we have many resources to help us move with our quest for deeper faith lives, including skilled and informed parish staff personnel, books and printed materials available for our use, and the many opportunities for adult education that have emerged because of our diocesan synod process. Allowing our questions to become the springboard for growth is up to us — the rewards will be terrific!

"Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs."

—St. John Chrysostom

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