



Daily Reflections

JOURNEYING THROUGH CHALLENGING TIMES

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FAITH IS THE EVIDENCE OF THINGS NOT SEEN

By Father David C. Robinson, SJ

Excerpts from Today's Readings

Brothers and sisters: Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen. Because of it the ancients were well attested. By faith we understand that the universe was ordered by the word of God, so that what is visible came into being through the invisible.

HEBREWS 11:1-3

Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them. Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses, and they were conversing with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here!"

Reflection

Throughout the history and evolution of Christian traditions, conversation about our ways of knowing God and God's action in the world have taken on many forms and frames of meaning. There are three points of focus we can explore: faith, belief, and knowledge. Today's readings illuminate a scriptural view of the meaning of faith: **Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen.... By faith we understand that the universe was ordered by the word of God, so that what is visible came into being through the invisible.** Faith is an inner, personal or communal assertion of the truth of God's existence, actions, and divine intentions for all creation. By its very nature, **faith** is grounded in the 'invisible'—that is to say, an experience that cannot be measured by the usual metrics of science or rational argument.

The history of world religions has shown that 'faith alone' does not provide the structure and common language that allows traditions to communicate across communities, cultures, and languages. This leads to creeds, doctrines, and dogmas—the articulation of the founding revelation that generates what we term the framework of '**belief.**' The creed recited at each mass is a famous example. The structures of belief provide the communities with a common vocabulary and set of concepts to clarify their identity among themselves and to those unfamiliar with their history and religious practice.

In the wider world, beyond the 'people of faith' is the ubiquitous realm of factual and conceptual **knowledge.** This realm includes all the categories of human thought—from science, to mathematics, to philosophy, to psychology, to aesthetics, to politics and economics, and on and on. When the narrative of faith attempts to present itself in the language of the intellectual traditions, it can detour from its roots in the heart and soul of peoples, and journey along a path that is largely shaped by human rational creativity. Where the elemental experiences in the birthing of a family of faith move into subsequent areas of dialog and discourse, we uncover the endless arenas in which religious evolution can lead to disputes, conflicts, schisms, and even open warfare. This is not to say that faith communities should not be in profound conversation with all the forms of human thought. However, reducing the life of the mind to the framework of faith is known as *fideism*, an ideology that has led to massive social chaos in religious history.

Rather, the voices of faith should not replace its unique center of meaning and transformative strength with a strategy that tries to show that faith is 'as good as' or 'as true as' science, or philosophy, or law, or mathematics. Faith is a foundational truth, not dependent upon what we can quantify or justify by logic. To speak of the faith experience in terms not adequate to its authentic center in the human heart is to undermine its rich value for human flourishing. An artist does not feel compelled to define beauty in terms of its material components or physical composition. A lawyer does not feel compelled to validate justice in terms of juridical language or legal precedents. Why must faith 'prove' that it is as empirical, logical, systematic, or universal as various other human forms of inquiry?

In our own 'walks of faith,' we can feel free to explore and communicate what we experience and what that experience means for our lives and the lives of our families and communities. The culturally imposed notions that religious realities must be subject to the same 'proof' as science, or philosophy is an opinion, not a 'fact.' The upheavals in science over the last 150 years show the limitations of such an opinion. Physicists in the late 19th century thought they had mapped the operations of the universe with mathematical precision. Then came Einstein, and that model collapsed. A century of new theories seemed to hone in on a 'final' explanation for physical reality. However, since 1998, scientists have been observing what is known as Dark Energy and Dark Matter—a phenomenon that makes up some 95% of the universe predicted by mathematical studies, but they cannot pinpoint exactly 'where' it is! So much for a full 'scientific model' of the universe?

Such 'facts' are not meant to be an anti-scientific polemic. They are simply a caution that each area of human learning must maintain humility within its own sphere, and not mandate strategies for other realms of experience. The life of faith is a unique and valuable component in human history, and must be explored and appreciated in itself. The phenomena we label the 'divine' cannot be reduced to other categories, nor should we try to refute inadequate claims made against them. Trying to be a 'science' of God dooms religious experience to an argument that cannot succeed. If we do not feel a need to provide a physics of beauty, or a mathematics of justice, faith need not be measured by such metrics. Our 'explanation' can be found in the illumination of souls throughout history, and the transformation of lives and cultures. If we let God be God, and follow the journey of love in our religious path, we have 'reason enough' to continue on the way of spiritual discovery and the unfolding of grace.



For Pondering

- In your own walk of faith, do you feel a need to 'explain' your faith in others' terms?
 - How do you respond to the 'scientific' arguments against religious faith?
 - What are the deepest values that faith has fostered in your life?
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