

## The Maturing of Faith

One of my earliest memories is learning how to say the “Our Father.” My mom and dad taught me the prayer, and Miss Barta, my kindergarten teacher, drew pictures to illustrate the prayer. I also remember learning other prayers, and then about the Mass as well.

As the years went on though, I’d be challenged to think about my faith in different ways. Meeting others who weren’t of my faith for the first time in high school caused me to think a little more deeply about the faith and be challenged in it. I’d try different types of prayer, and also have to discern my vocation. And then going through confirmation classes and of course seminary caused me to think about my faith more deeply.

Throughout this season of Lent into Easter, we’ll see the apostles go through a faith journey as well. In this week’s Gospel of the Transfiguration, Peter has the line that it is good to be on the mountain seeing Moses and Elijah and Jesus transfigured so he would like to build three tents. That’s something you do for the Jewish Festival of Booths, which he thinks that the journey up the mountain is about. Of course he’s wrong. But in time, he’ll come to learn what the experience on that mountain was all about. His faith will undergo more maturity as he goes back down the mountain, but it will take time. For we all know he will deny Jesus too. And even after the resurrection, Peter will mature in his faith once again, learning that it is OK to eat with gentiles and that what God has called clean he should not call unclean.

The point is that for Peter and all of us, faith is a journey.

Lent is a great time to think about our own faith journey, and to see how it is maturing.

For one, faith involves a consistency. By connecting with God daily through prayer, actively engaging in Sunday Mass, we can come to know God at a deeper level.

Second, faith involves listening to God. When we pray, often there are prayers we say that are familiar such as the Lord’s Prayer or Hail Mary, but prayer should also entail listening as well. Prayer gives us direction. And part of the maturity of our faith is “letting go, letting God.” Sometimes God will challenge us to take a new direction, or say no to something we really want. But as we’ll reflect on come Holy Week, Jesus lets go of His will to trust in the Father’s plan, and ultimately though it leads to the pain and darkness of Good Friday, Jesus triumphs on Easter. So will we, when we listen to God.

Third, faith entails challenging ourselves to think more deeply about ourselves and one another. For instance, thinking about the words of the Lord’s Prayer; what is it we need help with in terms of temptation? Who do we need to work on forgiving who has wronged us? Do we keep holy the name of God by getting to know Him on a deeper level? Do we let God’s will be done in our lives? It’s important we say or read the words whether it’s familiar prayers or praying with Scripture, but also that we think about them.

Fourth, think about the faith. Why do we believe what we believe? There are many great resources to look at to learn more about our beliefs from the catechism to online resources to books by outstanding Catholic authors modern and classic. So do some digging (and investigating - because for every good Catholic website out there there are plenty too that are heavily biased or may have bad information) and try to learn more about the faith to grow in it.

Fifth, think about who you pray for. We often pray for ourselves, for those we love. But how for people we do not like, or our enemies, or people who have wronged us or those we care about?

Sixth, remember that at the end of the time on the mountain, Jesus, Peter, James and John go back down the mountain. Prayers gives us guidance and strength, but we also face the challenges of life. Jesus though journeys with us. Living it out through our vocations, through forgiving others, through going the extra mile for people all entails work, which is a manifestation of our faith.

Seventh, experiment with different types of prayer. From familiar prayers to the Scriptures to silence and meditation, to visiting God in front of the Tabernacle or under the stars, or praying with others, there are so many ways to pray.

And lastly, share the faith. Sometimes we can be fearful of talking about our faith. Or it can be frustrating if people don't share our beliefs, or fall away, or we can think what we say falls on deaf ears. From strangers to family, we need to seize opportunities to evangelize through patience and persistence, to help bring one another to God.

My faith continues to grow, as it will throughout my life. I've learned a lot since those first prayers with my parents, but every day I strive to learn the meaning of the words I say, and to hear the voice of God, and try better to live it out. I have no idea what tomorrow will bring, but I do know that journeying with God, He will get me through tomorrow and home to Him, for He is with me every step of the way up and down the mountains of life.

God's blessings to you,

Fr. Paul