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"Fear is the great enemy of faith"

In his 1 May general audience, Pope Francis continued his catechetical cycle on vices and virtues, speaking about faith.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today I would like to talk about the virtue of *faith*. Together with charity and hope, this virtue is described as *theological*. There are three theological virtues: faith, hope and

charity. Why are they theological? Because they can be lived – this virtue, the three theological virtues – only thanks to the gift of God. The three theological virtues are the great gifts that God gives to our moral capacity. Without them, we could be prudent, just, strong and temperate, but we would not have eyes that see even in the dark, we would not have a heart that loves even when it is not loved, we would not have a hope that dares against all hope.

What is faith? This question: what is faith? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, it explains that faith is the act by which the human being freely commits himself to God (no. 1814). In this faith, Abraham was the great father. When he agreed to leave the land of his ancestors to head for the land that God would show him, he would probably have been judged insane: why leave the

known for the unknown, the certain for the uncertain? But why do this? It is insane, isn't it? But Abraham sets off, as if he could see the invisible: this is what the Bible says about Abraham. "He went, not knowing where he was to go." This is beautiful. And it will again be the invisible that makes him go up the mountain with his son Isaac, the only son of the promise, who only at the last moment will be spared from sacrifice. In this faith, Abraham becomes the father of a long line of descendants. Faith made him fruitful.

Moses was be a man of faith when, welcoming God's voice even more than one doubt could have shaken him, he continued to stand firm and trust in the Lord, and even defend the people who were so often lacking in faith.

The Virgin Mary was a woman of faith when, receiving the annunciation of the Angel, which many would have dismissed as too demanding and risky, answered, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (*Lk 1:38*). And, with her heart full of faith, with her heart full of trust in God, Mary set out on a path of which she knew neither the route nor the dangers.

Faith is the virtue that makes the Christian. Because to be Christians is not first and foremost about accepting a culture, with the values that accompany it, but being Christian is welcoming and cherishing a bond, a bond with God: God and I, myself and the amiable face of Jesus. This bond is what makes us Christians.

With regard to faith, an episode of the Gospel comes to mind. Jesus’

disciples were crossing the lake, and are surprised by the storm. They think they can get by with the strength of their arms, with the resources of their experience, but the boat starts to fill up with water and they are seized by panic (cf. *Mk* 4: 35-41). They do not realize that they have the solution before their very eyes: Jesus is there with them on the boat, in the midst of the storm, and Jesus “was asleep,” says the Gospel. When they finally awaken Him, fearful and even angry that He would let them die, Jesus rebukes them: “Why are you afraid? *Have you no faith?*” (*Mk* 4:40).

Here, then, is the great enemy of faith: it is not intelligence, nor is it reason, as, alas, some continue obsessively to repeat; but the great enemy of *fear*. For this reason, faith is the first gift to welcome in Christian life: a gift that must be welcomed and asked for daily, so that

it may be renewed in us. It is seemingly a small gift, yet it is the essential one. When we were brought to the baptismal font, our parents, after announcing the name they had chosen for us, were asked by the priest – this happened in our baptism: “What do you ask of the Church of God?” And the parents answered: “Faith, baptism!”

For Christian parents, aware of the grace that has been given them, that is the gift to ask for their child too: faith. With it, parents know that, even in the midst of the trials of life, their child will not drown in fear. See, the enemy is fear. They also know that, when the child ceases to have a parent on this earth, he will continue to have a God the Father in heaven, who will never abandon him. Our love is so fragile, and only God's love conquers death.

Certainly, as the Apostle says, faith is not for all (cf. 2 *Thess* 3:2), and we too, who are believers, often realize that we have only a short supply. Often Jesus can rebuke us, as He did with His disciples, for being “men of little faith.” But it is the happiest gift, the only virtue we are permitted to envy. Because those who have faith are inhabited by a force that is not only human; indeed, faith “triggers” grace in us and opens the mind to the mystery of God. As Jesus once said, “If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this sycamore tree, ‘Be rooted up, and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you” (*Lk* 17:6). Therefore, let us too, like the disciples, repeat to Him: Lord, increase our faith! (*Lk* 17:5). It is a beautiful prayer! Shall we say it all together? “Lord, increase our faith.” Let us say it together. [everyone] “Lord, increase our faith.” Too quiet... a bit louder: [everyone]

“Lord, increase our faith!” Thank
you.

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