

Homily 19th Sunday: Cycle 3: 2016: Wis 18: 6-9; Ps. 33; Heb 11: 1-2; 8-19; Lk 12: 32-48

“The Challenge of Living of Life of Faith in our Time”

1. We hear a beautiful definition of Faith in the 2nd reading today from Hebrews:

Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. In the normal scheme of things: faith is the supernatural virtue infused into the soul by God at the moment of our Baptism. Whether it grows or not in our life depends on many factors: *our family, our cultural environment, how open we are to God’s grace over time, etc.* The saying in Catholic theology is: **Grace builds upon nature.** If the natural foundation is not good, it is much harder to grow in the life of God. This is why in the Western world: meaning Western Europe, the United States, and Australia, the life of Faith collectively is not as strong as it used to be - mainly because of the breakdown of the Christian Family in many quarters, and so children and young people increasing are not getting the example of Christian life at home, and so it is much less likely they will have a Christian outlook on life when they go into the world. This is also what is meant when you hear the term: **the secularization of culture.** It’s not always an outright denial of the existence of God but rather acting like He doesn’t exist (St. John Paul II called it *practical atheism*), as God, sadly, is not a reference point in the daily decisions of an increasing number of people who live in the Western world.

2. We as believers must respond differently if we want to draw close to God and have a

good influence on the children and young people and adults in our culture. The letter to the Hebrews goes on to cite the examples of faith in the OT: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and Sarah. All who responded to God in faith - even when things didn’t make sense on the human level. Do we do the same? If we are honest, all of us know that at times in our life we struggle living in faith. I remember when I was a teenager and I struggled with believing in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, and it was only after much prayer and reflection and asking God for a deeper faith, that I came to realize that at every Mass a miracle truly happens when the priest prays over the gifts and by the Holy Spirit the bread and wine are truly changed in substance into the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, i.e., His full life as God and man that He wants to share with us. Flowing from that, I realized this is why the Church teaches we are never to receive

Holy Communion if we are conscious of having mortal sin on our soul, in which case we must first go to Confession with a firm purpose of amendment before receiving our Lord in Holy Communion – if it was just a symbol or just bread and wine, it wouldn't matter the state of our soul, but because it really is Jesus, it does. This realization of what the Eucharist truly is and means is one of the things that led me to think about the possibility of becoming a priest when I was a teenager, as well as the need to stay out of mortal sin and go to Confession regularly. But the bottom line is faith is a battle at some times more than others. And since I know this battle very well, I encourage any young person here at St. Thomas who is considering the possibility of a call to the priesthood or religious life to get in touch with me as your pastor, and I can hopefully help you look at some of these questions of Faith and help you in your process of discernment.

- 3. Finally the main way we grow in the virtue of Faith is through the mystery of the Cross.** This goes counter-intuitive against the modern mentality of avoiding suffering at all costs. It's not that we Christians seek out suffering for its own sake, but rather we are realistic and know that suffering is part of this life, be it emotional, psychological, spiritual or physical; and that it is through this mystery that we can draw closer to God and grow in our Faith, as well as through it make reparation for sin, our own and others. It is through the mystery of suffering that I can honestly say throughout my life that I have drawn closer to God in faith. Too often we always worry about if people like us and value us, but God in His mercy will try to draw us out of this vanity and foolishness in light of eternity: to only be concerned about what He thinks of us - what a freeing reality that is! **The only way that usually happens is through the mystery of the Cross.** Suffering united with Christ wakes us up to the true reality - which is: this life on earth is passing by, so why not live in such a way that when the Lord calls us out of this life we will be ready to see Him and give a good account of our life, as Jesus says in the Gospel today. Are we using our human talents and time and energy to serve God and His Church first, or have we placed other things in place of it? Now is the time to reprioritize - to say to the Lord: *help me Lord to live my Catholic Faith fully and to always unite my daily sufferings with you in love, in imitation of Jesus.* God bless you.