

The Holy Spirit, Light of Truth

Pilgrim friends,

We have just attended the high mass of Pentecost, at a place called Les Courlis. In the Gospel we have heard these words of Our Lord: *"The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name... will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have told you"* ¹. »

The Holy Spirit is in fact, according to the Gospel of St. John, "*the Spirit of Truth* ." And the texts of the liturgy often use the vocabulary **of light** to describe its action in our souls. Thus, the prayer of Pentecost begins with these words: *" God, who has instructed the hearts of the faithful in this day by the light of the Holy Spirit,"* ³ »

The Holy Spirit enlightens the intellect, he makes it grasp the Truth. and

This is fundamental for the missionary. We will see that the primary role of the missionary **is to proclaim, without compromise, the Truth**, the Good News of the Gospel, the Good News of Christ; we will then see that **this Truth is credible**, and that the missionary must be able to show **that it is reasonable to believe** ; finally, we will see that Faith, far from being a fragile belief or a perpetual questioning, **is a solid and firm certainty**.



Pentecost, El Greco (made between 1597 and 1600), Prado Museum, Madrid

1. Jn 14:23-26.

2. Jn 14:17.

3. Collection on Pentecost Sunday.

The proclamation of the faith is a proclamation of the truth

Here on pilgrimage, as everywhere in France, we are witnessing many conversions, and it is a great joy to see the number of catechumens, baptisms, neophytes who join the Church. As Archbishop Léonard wrote, *"in the face of the anonymity and coldness of the atheistic world in which we live, many men and women are turning once again and rightly to the Christian faith to find a place of personal fulfilment and a warm human home"*: but he went on and warned against *"the risk [...] to expect too much **from feeling alone** and to forget that faith, addressing itself to the whole man, **is also addressed to human intelligence**"*⁴

What does it mean to "believe", what does it mean to have faith? Certainly, faith is first of all **the adherence to a person**, to Jesus Christ true man and true God; but it is at the same time, and inseparably, the adherence **of the intellect to all the truth that Christ has revealed to us**.⁵ This is what the text of the act of faith affirms: *"My God, I firmly believe all the truths which you have revealed and teach us through your Church, because you can neither deceive yourself nor us."*

Why insist on the place of truth in faith? Because *"To love, one must know."* **To love God, we must know Him, and to make God loved, we must make Him known.** Let us listen to St. Paul: *"Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how can we invoke him without first believing in him? And how can we believe without first hearing it? And how can we hear without a preacher? [...] Faith is born of preaching, and preaching is done by the word of Christ."*⁶ Yes, **there is no love, nor salvation, without truth**: for *"God wills that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth"*⁷

For this reason, the missionary cannot be satisfied with **exemplarity of life** alone – what is called **the witness of charity**. This is certainly an essential dimension of mission, but it is at the service of the **explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ and his doctrine** – what is called the witness of the truth. Therefore the Apostle exhorts his disciple

4. André Léonard (Mgr.), *Les Raisons de croire*, Éditions du Jubilé, 2010, p. 8.

5. *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, no. 150.

6. Rom 10:13-14, 17.

7. 1 Tim 2:4.

Timothy: *"I adjure you before God and before Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, in the name of his Appearance and Kingdom: proclaim the word, insist in season and out of season, refute, threaten, exhort, with untiring patience and concern to instruct."*⁸ No, like the apostles, *"we cannot be silent !* Bossuet said: *"Truth is a common good: **whoever possesses it owes it to his brothers according to the opportunities that God presents to him.**"*¹⁰ To leave someone in ignorance or error, out of delicacy, so as not to offend him, to respect his freedom, is to cruelly lack Charity: for only *"the Truth will set you free"*¹¹.

This truth that the missionary proclaims is credible

The Importance of Apologetics

To be a missionary, then, is to proclaim the Gospel of Christ: but for this to happen, it is necessary to be able to prepare the minds to receive it, showing that the Gospel of Christ **can be believed**, that it is **credible**. Having faith is not about "unplugging your brain" by refusing to think. As Bishop Léonard wrote: *"Even if faith exceeds reason, it is not without reasons."*¹² It is these *"reasons for believing"* that must be known, and it is the role of apologetics [which means justification, or defense, in Greek] to show that it is *"reasonable to believe."* *"We would not believe,"* says St. Thomas Aquinas, *"if we did not see that there are things that deserve to be believed."*¹³

Saint Peter tells us the same thing: *" **Always be ready to respond, but with gentleness and respect, to anyone who asks you the reason for the hope that is in you.**"*¹⁴ With these words, the apostle asks every Christian to be able to defend and justify his faith in the face of the legitimate questions of men.

For St. Thomas Aquinas, this comes from a very simple idea: God is the source of human intelligence, and the source of faith. Thus, even if it is true that faith "goes beyond" what intelligence can understand, faith

8. 2 Tim 4:1-4.

9. Acts 4:20.

10. Bossuet, *Panegyric of St. Catherine of Alexandria*.

11. Jn 8:32.

12. André Léonard (Mgr.), *op. cit.*, *Reasons to believe*, 4th cover.

13. *Summa Theologica*, IIa IIae, q. 1, a. 4.

14. 1 Pet 3:14-15; translation by Canon Crampon.

will never be "contradictory" with human intelligence. There is a **beautiful harmony between faith and reason**, for God, the author of reason and faith, is consistent with himself; and even if the human intellect cannot by itself reach the level of faith (for faith is a supernatural gift), it can discover for itself that it would be very much a gift. "intelligent" to believe, **that it is reasonable to open oneself to the gift of faith.**

What arguments should be put forward?

How, through the work of the intellect, can one succeed in showing that Revelation is "credible"? This goes through several paths, and this is the whole purpose of apologetics.

In the first place, reason is capable of proving, by itself, certain truths which are the "foundations" of faith, which are called the "*preambulia Fidei* ": for example, **one can attain with certainty the existence of God, or the immortality of the soul.** Even a non-believing philosopher, if honest, can do this with certainty. It is important to have worked on these demonstrations, for example with the 5 ways of God's existence in Saint Thomas Aquinas.

Secondly, it can be shown, by historical arguments accessible to all, that **Jesus Christ really existed, and that the Gospels are reliable historical sources**, that what they contain could not have been invented or falsified.

Then, we can look at the content of the Gospels: one thing is certain, and that is that Jesus Christ really said that he was the Messiah announced by the prophets, that he really taught a new doctrine, that he really said that he was God. There are two solutions: either he is telling the truth, or he is a liar or a madman! Now, if we look at the great holiness of his life, the incredible wisdom of his message, the miracles and prophecies he performed to confirm his word, the way he fulfilled the ancient prophecies, if we looked at how the gospel spread throughout the earth, the fruits of holiness of his message throughout history, the conclusion is clear: **Jesus Christ is credible, he deserves that I trust him , that I adhere to his message.**

The most precious argument, the "*supreme sign*"¹⁵, is **the resurrection of Christ.** The empty tomb while it was guarded, the way in which the

15. Abbé Lucien, *Apologétique*, p. 525.

the accounts, the unbelief of the apostles at the beginning, then their sudden change of attitude, and the multiple testimonies, the unexpected conversion of Saint Paul on the road to Damascus, all converge towards a single conclusion: the resurrection of Christ is a certain historical event. Add to this the first martyrs, who gave their lives to bear witness to what they said they had seen with their own eyes: the risen Christ. " *I only believe in stories whose witnesses would have their throats cut* ," said Pascal. **Yes, believing in Jesus Christ is not madness, it is even the most reasonable option!**

All this work of apologetics is very traditional, but it should be noted that it was strongly attacked in the twentieth century by modern currents, which reproached it for "*rationalizing*" faith (for example: "*There is no point in proving the existence of God, or the existence of Jesus, we believe in it, that' s all!* ") **This contempt for apologetics has had a considerable influence in the crisis of the transmission of the faith in recent decades.** Fortunately, today we are seeing a revival of a real interest in apologetics, especially in evangelization movements: in fact, what better way to use to defend and present Christianity than to speak to the intelligence of one's interlocutor?

To deepen these questions, you will find at the end of the booklet good advice from recent apologetic books: and at the end of the pilgrimage, the little book *Be rational, become a Catholic*, by Matthieu Lavagna, will be distributed free of charge to those who want it, which explains all this very well.

Apologetics prepares for faith, but it does not demonstrate it

Be careful, though! By reason, we can truly say: " *Jesus' message is credible*. But in order to truly believe, there is a leap to be made, and this leap requires the grace of God, impelling my will to believe definitively.¹⁶ Then we truly attain the theological faith.

Understand what this means. It is not *because* we have discovered that Christianity is credible that we have faith. Faith is not the "*logical*" conclusion of the apologetic process; it is a gift of God, made in a soul prepared to receive it. Our faith is not based exclusively on rational

16. Michel Labourdette, o.p., *Cours de théologie morale* ("Petit cours"), t. 2: *Morale spéciale*, "Bibliothèque de la Revue thomiste", Parole et silence, 2012, p. 120: "Transforming this objective assessment: 'the message is believable' into a decision to believe in it: 'I must believe and I want to believe', depends on the free will raised by grace, then placed on a completely different plane, in the face of another motive."

arguments: it is based on God who **in us** testifies that he is the Truth. It is an immense grace, and that is why faith attains such a great certainty in us—a supernatural certainty.

The light of faith provides great certainty

If I tell you, " *I think the next stop is in 5 minutes* ," you're going to say to me, annoyed, " *Do you think so, or are you sure ?* Indeed, in everyday language, when we say " *I believe* ", it often means that we are not certain.

But it is quite different for faith. We said it in the act of faith: " *My God, I firmly believe* "! When the believer says, " *I believe in the Holy Trinity* ," it is not a vague uncertain belief: he says it with absolute certainty. Only, this certainty does not come from the fact that he has seen the Trinity (he does not have the evidence – to *videre*, to see in Latin), or because he would have "understood" how one God can be in three Persons, by an impeccable demonstration made by his intelligence: no, his certainty comes from the gift of faith, the gift of God who reveals the Trinity to him. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states this very clearly:

" *Faith is certain, more certain than all human knowledge, because it is based on the very Word of God, which cannot lie. Certainly, revealed truths may seem obscure to human reason and experience, but "the certainty which the divine light gives is greater than that which the light of natural reason gives"* ¹⁷ . »

Faith is like a light in the night. Just as the blind man is guided in the night by someone he trusts, so the faithful trust God when he makes an act of faith:¹⁸ and the strength of faith is commensurate with the trust he has in God, in his truthfulness: therefore it is so certain, more certain even than all human certainties. But just as the guide does not blind the blind, so faith does not give us clear vision. The night remains, it is the normal condition for the exercise of faith, as long as we are on earth. It sometimes makes it difficult to exercise and preserve faith.

17. CCC, no. 157, quoting St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIa-IIae, q. 171, a. 5, obj. 3. Cf. Ib., q. 4, a. 8.

18. This comparison of the terms "faith" and "trust" is in no way intended to reduce faith to trust, which was one of Luther's mistakes.

Yes, there are things that are difficult to believe in Christianity: the mystery of the Trinity, but also the mystery of Evil, Hell, etc. But the Catholic takes everything, **not because he understands everything**, but because he has absolute trust in God who teaches him his truths. A Catholic who says, " *I take this truth, but I refuse another* ," who makes his bargain in the truths of the Gospel, **completely loses theological faith** : for by rejecting even the smallest of revealed truths, one cuts oneself off from the source, one refuses to trust in God who reveals. This is the meaning of the word "heretic": from *heiretikos*, "he who chooses".

So **let's fight against the modern temptation to consider faith as a perpetual questioning, a questioning, an uncertain journey**. God testifies in me that he is the truth, it is solid! And let us be certain that by faithfully following Christ and the Catholic Church, we adhere to the full and complete truth. Certainly, there are difficulties in the faith, because of the night. But these are not doubts: doubts, if they arise, must be fought, because they can endanger faith. They fight each other through study, formation, prayer: "*Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief.*" And as Cardinal Newman said: "*A thousand difficulties are not in doubt.*"

"*Come, O Holy Spirit, and send a ray of your light from heaven. [...] O blessed light, flood the hearts of your faithful to the innermost*^{of the world}. »

Quotes

The greatest misfortune for a century or a country is the abandonment or diminishment of the truth. One can get up from everything else; one never recovers from the sacrifice of principles. Characters may falter at given moments, and public morals may receive some injury from vice or bad example, **but nothing is lost so long as the true doctrines remain standing in their integrity**. With them, everything is redone sooner or later, men and institutions, **because we are always capable of returning to the good when we have not left the truth**. What would take away even the hope of salvation would be the desertion of principles, in

19. Mk 9:24.

20. S. John Henry Newman, *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, trans. L. Michelin-Delimoges revised and corrected by M. Durand and P. Veyriras, Geneva, Ad Solem, 2003, p. 422.

21. Sequence *Veni Sancte Spiritus* from the Mass of Pentecost.

outside of which nothing solid and lasting can be built. **Therefore, the greatest service that a man can render to his fellows in times of weakness or obscurity is to affirm the truth without fear, even when he is not listened to** ; for it is a furrow of light that he opens through the minds and, if his voice does not succeed in dominating the sounds of the moment, at least it will be collected in the future as the messenger of salvation.

Monsignor Freppel

I am [says faith] the torch by whose rays one walks in the night of the present life; it is in my light that the lost coin is sought, and, though I shine in a place of darkness, I unveil the heavenly mysteries. I am the dawn of the beatific vision, I precede the eternal sun, and I make the rays of glory visible from afar.

Guillaume de Paris, *Liber de moribus*, Lethielleux, 1903, p. 197

Do you not feel the need to tell these truths once and for all to your age? Has it not long enough been flattered and misled by supporting the truth only with extreme moderation? In the meantime, the Society, which is perishing because it is not spoken of frankly and properly about Jesus Christ, is asking you to give an account of your talents, your influence, what am I saying, your Christian convictions, so often concealed under naturalistic exteriors.

Dom Guéranger

There is a grace attached to the full confession of the truth. This confession, the Apostle tells us, is the salvation of those who make it, and experience shows that it is also the salvation of those who hear it.

Dom Guéranger, *The Christian Sense of History*, p. 53