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to

Homily for Requiem Mass of Robert McCarthy  
17 July 2018

(Jn19:17-18, 25-30) Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! Faced, as we are, with the utter finality of death, science offers us no help whatsoever. Faith alone tells us that our beloved Robert, who died in the Lord, will indeed rise again to eternal life on the last day. But how do we know that this is really so? Smarting as we are from death's bitter sting, we would do well on this solemn occasion to examine our faith and its claims more closely.

Faith, like other virtues, is simply a good habit. Like all virtues, faith lies in the middle between two contrary vices – one vice being a deficiency, the other an excess. [Consider the virtue of hope for a moment! Hope lies between the opposite extremes of despair and presumption. Despair has too little of hope's active ingredient, presumption has too much of it. If a student despairs of passing his test, he won't study because it seems futile. If he is presumptuous, on the other hand, then he won't study either because it seems like overkill. Although opposite extremes, these two vices have a lot in common with one another: they both prevent the student from studying. Hope alone inspires him to crack the books. The virtue of courage also lies between two opposite extremes. Cowardice has too little of courage's active ingredient while foolhardiness has too much of it. Cowardice is afraid of everything while foolhardiness is afraid of nothing. The courageous man, however, is afraid of some things but not everything. Only courage wins the war. The coward retreats when he should fight while the foolhardy man fights when he should retreat.

Like other virtues, faith also lies in between two contrary extremes:] credulity and incredulity. Credulity, or gullibility, has too much of faith's active ingredient while incredulity, or rationalism, has too little of it. Credulity believes absolutely everything; incredulity believes absolutely nothing. Authentic faith, on the other hand, believes some things but not everything. Although opposite extremes, credulity and incredulity are very similar. If incredulity prevailed, there would be no religion on earth. If credulity prevailed, each man would found his own religion. One scenario is just as bad as the other. Both extremes would spell the end of the one true religion, which Faith alone believes to the exclusion of all others.

Credulity is completely subjective: all that matters is what I, the subject, decide to believe. My choice is everything. Incredulity is completely objective: I have no choice. Objective evidence compels me to acknowledge a truth that is outside of me. Once I see this microphone/podium, I have no choice. Sure, I might say it isn't here, but internally I can no longer believe anything but what my eyes tell me. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! If credulity depends on an absolute whim and incredulity depends on absolute proof, what then does faith in the middle depend on? – Nothing more or less than a sign; which is somewhat less than proof yet much more than a whim.

Scientists are only persuaded by absolute proof; so many people today feel that logic is on the side of incredulity or rationalism. According to them, we shouldn't believe anything without absolute proof. However reasonable this may sound in theory, in practice it is a fatal error. Let me explain! Faith is believing something as certain even though I didn't see it for myself. Why do I believe? – Because I am convinced by the testimony of a witness – someone who did see it. When that witness is a human being, then we are talking about human faith. When that witness is God – speaking through His prophets in the Old Testament or His Church in the New – then we are talking about divine faith.

A case in point: Despite the lack of any proof, none of you had the slightest doubt, until now, that I am a priest; but now, some of you may have started to wonder. Wherever I go, I minister to people who weren't at my ordination, who may not have ever laid eyes on me before. I simply present myself as a priest and others accept me as such – no questions asked. This is human faith. Do you see how second nature human faith is to us? Human life is impossible to live without it. Without proof, we routinely believe that the pilot can fly the plane, the surgeon can operate and the cook won't poison us. We habitually act on information for which we have no proof. If we needed proof before acting on any piece of information, then our life would be completely frustrated. We might as well not get out of bed in the morning! Logic, therefore, is on the side of faith. Human faith corroborates the most trivial aspects of life but it isn't limited to these. After all, we only know who our parents are through human faith!

If human life is impossible to live without human faith, then we shouldn't fault God for making the divine life of heaven impossible to attain without divine faith. [Humanity's fall from grace began back in paradise when Eve believed the devil's lies without absolute proof. You might say that mankind fell through faith, so we must also be saved through faith. We too must believe God without absolute proof.]

We have already said that faith is based on signs which are somewhat less than a proof but much more than a whim. There are umpteen signs that we could consider. Here, however, we only have time to consider one of them. So let's start at the ground zero of revealed religion!

Christians, Muslims and Jews all trace their origin back to the Old Testament, which is the story of the Jews. Among all the other nations on earth, they were God's favorites. Why? Because their patriarch, Abraham, passed the supreme test. What was this test? No, Abraham didn't have to fight wild beasts, jump off a cliff or go without food for 40 days! Instead, God asked Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac.

But when Abraham took the knife to slay Isaac, God's angel cried out from heaven, saying, "Do not lay a hand on the boy... Now I know that you love God, because you have not withheld from me your only begotten son." (Gen22:12) Then God swore to Abraham, saying "because you have done this... all nations on earth will be blessed through your offspring." (16,18) This promised offspring was none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. God's request of Abraham puzzled countless generations. After all, hadn't God forbidden Israel to practice human sacrifice? Indeed He had, and conspicuously so since other nations roundabout Israel did practice it. With Christ's coming, however, the mystery was solved. Hindsight, as they say, is always 20/20. [God requested a human sacrifice as a prophetic token of His desire to save the world through another human sacrifice.] God the Father would deliver His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to the cruelest death imaginable for our sake because Abraham was willing to deliver his beloved son, Isaac, to death for God's sake! This is where justice and mercy reconcile and kiss. Justice is satisfied by the absolute equality of the exchange: a Son for a son; mercy is satisfied by the infinite imbalance; true God for mere man – a victim that was actually sacrificed for one that was merely offered.

The birth of both Jesus and Isaac was miraculous. Both became willing victims after being senselessly condemned to death. In obedience to a loving father, both shouldered the wood needed for their own sacrifice. But the trial of Abraham doesn't simply prefigure Christ's crucifixion; it also prefigures His resurrection; for Isaac received the reprieve from his death sentence on the third day even as Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. If we had a sign like this in the world of investment, we'd bet the farm.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! If we, like Abraham, give God our finite all, He in turn will give us His infinite All. God only expects consistency. He is only expecting as much trust from us as we routinely give to one another. So let's not perform an autopsy on the articles of our Catholic faith when we seldom bother to take the temperature of human assertions! Our beloved Robert will indeed rise again!

Jesus summed up religion pure and simple with His Golden Rule. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you!" (Mt7:12) This rule is consistency in a nutshell. Robert kept the Golden Rule by never speaking unkindly of others. According to St. James, he who can control his tongue is a perfect man. (Jas3:2) Yet Robert would be the last one to canonize himself. Let me end, therefore, with a solemn appeal on his behalf. Season your tears of grief with many Hail Mary's! Pray the Rosary for the repose of his dear soul! May our beloved Robert rest in peace together with his loving wife, Judy! And may perpetual light shine upon them both until the glorious day of the resurrection! So be it! Amen!