

The God Who Speaks

2: A Journey of Trust

Opening Prayer and Welcome

God our loving Father,
You made us your children in baptism.
Pour out on us the gifts of your Holy Spirit.
Help us as a parish to know the paths we must follow
so as to build up your kingdom.
Teach us to grow in faith,
to encourage one another with words of hope,
and to care for your family with love.
Let us bear witness to the Good News,
and be faithful followers of your Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ
who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit
for ever and ever.
Amen

Introduction to the Theme

Everything, these days, seems to be broken down into *soundbites*. Politicians use them a lot, to get across their message or to stir people up. People swap memes on their phones or get a Quote of the Day delivered to their inbox. Even the Pope does it, sending a scripture quote each day from his @Pontifex Twitter handle! We may think these snippets are great or we may hate them, but they are the language of our times.

Surprisingly, though, they were also the language of Jesus' time.

When Jesus said something, people remembered the key message, the *point* of what he was saying. And, in fact, the gospels - though they look more like stories, or even histories - are actually collections of these things that people remembered Jesus said - or did.

So they're great for reading out at Mass: a short(ish) reading from a gospel and you get the point.

But what if you're trying to understand the idea of a *journey*? Particularly if you want to understand the kind of journey that someone like Peter, or Mary the Mother of Jesus, or Mary Magdalene, or even Nicodemus in John's gospel, went on: What was their journey of trust?

We have to do some detective work - and we can do it for ourselves - seeing what happens each time a person appears in the gospel stories. These were real people, not storybook characters, and they each went on a journey in discovering and learning about God, by learning through Jesus.

Scripture Reading

Hebrews 11:1-14 (JB)

Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of the realities that at present remain unseen. It was for faith that our ancestors were commended.

It is by faith that we understand that the world was created by one word from God, so that no apparent cause can account for the things we can see.

It was because of his faith that Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain, and for that he was declared to be righteous when God made acknowledgment of his offerings. Though he is dead, he still speaks by faith.

It was because of his faith that Enoch was taken up and did not have to experience death: he was not to be found because God had taken him. This was because before his assumption it is attested that he had pleased God. Now it is impossible to please God without faith, since anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and rewards those who try to find him. It was through his faith that Noah, when he had been warned by God of something that had never been seen before, felt a holy fear and built an ark to save his family. By his faith the world was convicted, and he was able to claim the righteousness which is the reward of faith. It was by faith that Abraham obeyed the call to set out for a country that was the inheritance given to him and his descendants, and that he set out without knowing where he was going. By faith he arrived, as a foreigner, in the Promised Land, and lived there as if in a strange country, with Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. They lived there in tents while he looked forward to a city founded, designed and built by God.

It is equally by faith that Sarah, in spite of being past the age, was made able to conceive, because she believed that he who had made the promise would be faithful to it. Because of this, there came from one man, and one who was already as good as dead himself, more descendants than could be counted, as many as the stars of heaven or the grains of sand on the seashore.

All these died in faith, before receiving any of the things that had been promised, but they saw them in the far distance and welcomed them, recognising that they were only strangers and nomads on earth. People who use such terms about themselves make it quite plain that they are in search of their real homeland.

Discussion

This letter - clearly written to a community of Christians who understood the Jewish faith of the Old Testament - is by an unknown author. Despite its no longer being attributed to Saint Paul, it is an important part of scripture which teaches us, here, about what faith means: it is trust in God and, specifically, in God's promise. In the past - we are told - the promise was of a homeland and to make Israel God's own people. But the letter to the Hebrews tells us that God promised something more, and that this *more* only came in and through Jesus: 'Let us not lose sight of Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection' (Hebrews 12:2).

*You may find it helpful to sit with the text in silence for a little while. Then, in a spirit of helping one another, you could share your thoughts and discuss with one another what you notice in this text from the Bible. **Listen to one another** because God also speaks through our sisters and brothers in Christ, and through us.*

You can use the following to help you, or explore other thoughts that come to mind:

When you think about faith, who is it you think of? Is it someone you know, or is it someone like these 'great examples': Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Ruth?

If you talk about faith with someone - a friend - what would you say to them?

How might you describe your life as a journey of trust?

A quiet reflection

Close your eyes and remain in quiet for a little while. Ask yourself if you can feel God's Presence right now. Or perhaps you can think back to something that happened today, or yesterday, that - on reflection - says to you that God is near, perhaps that God has spoken to you. Or it could be in a memory that comes to mind, where you can say, perhaps, that God was close?

The classic story of a journey of trust is the one in the Old Testament, the story of the exodus of the people led by Moses.

We tend to think the journey of trust must be like that, but we don't often sit with the details of the story and realise that when they were on it the people of Israel didn't know what was going to happen next - even Moses didn't know! All they had was a promise, and it's hard to keep trusting in a promise especially when the going gets tough.

It's tempting to look at end-points, the successes: Saint Paul writing to his friend Timothy towards the end of his life, 'I have fought the good fight to the end; I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith; all there is to come now is the crown of righteousness reserved for me, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that Day' (2 Timothy 4:7-8); Jesus risen; Saint Peter preaching the good news all the way to martyrdom and sainthood.

But the reality of our lives is that they are *journeys*: we are *on the way*. And so, when Jesus tells us in John's gospel, 'I am the way' (John 14:6), perhaps we can recognise that, for us, the journey of trust is not merely in a promise of *something* or *somewhere*, as it was for Abraham or Moses: it is a promise of someone: Jesus himself.

Scripture Reading

John 14:1-7 (JB)

[Jesus said:]

'Do not let your hearts be troubled.
Trust in God still, and trust in me.
There are many rooms in my Father's house;
If there were not, I should have told you.
I am going now to prepare a place for you,
and after I have gone and prepared you a place,
I shall return to take you with me;
so that where I am
you may be too.

You know the way to the place where I am going.'

Thomas said, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?'

Jesus said:

'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.
No one can come to the Father except through me.
If you know me, you know my Father too.
From this moment you know him and have seen him'.

Discussion

*You may find it helpful to sit with the text in silence for a little while. Then, in a spirit of helping one another, you could share your thoughts and discuss with one another what you notice in this text from the Bible. **Listen to one another** because God also speaks through our sisters and brothers in Christ, and through us.*

You can use the following to help you, or explore other thoughts that come to mind:

What, do you think, does Jesus mean when he says, 'I am the Way'?

What do you feel in response to the words, 'Do not let your hearts be troubled'?

*What, do you think, we learn about **who Jesus is** from this passage?*

The Church Teaches

‘To recognise the word that the Lord wishes to speak to us through one of his saints, we do not need to get caught up in details, for there we might also encounter mistakes and failures. Not everything a saint says is completely faithful to the Gospel; not everything he or she does is authentic or perfect. What we need to contemplate is the totality of their life, their entire journey of growth in holiness, the reflection of Jesus Christ that emerges when we grasp their overall meaning as a person.

This is a powerful summons to all of us. You too need to see the entirety of your life as a mission. Try to do so by listening to God in prayer and recognising the signs that he gives you. Always ask the Spirit what Jesus expects from you at every moment of your life and in every decision you must make, so as to discern its place in the mission you have received. Allow the Spirit to forge in you the personal mystery that can reflect Jesus Christ in today’s world.

May you come to realise what that word is, the message of Jesus that God wants to speak to the world by your life. Let yourself be transformed. Let yourself be renewed by the Spirit, so that this can happen, lest you fail in your precious mission. The Lord will bring it to fulfilment despite your mistakes and missteps, provided that you do not abandon the path of love but remain ever open to his supernatural grace, which purifies and enlightens’.

(Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 22-24, 19 March 2018)

Read this passage again and sit with his words for a short while in silence.

Then feel free to share with one another the thoughts that come to your heart.

Closing Prayer

We thank you, Gracious Father, for this time of reflection.
We ask you to give us a fresh understanding of your Presence in our lives.
Strengthen us, we pray, in our faith
Help us to be present to each moment
So that we may see You and hear Your Voice
Everywhere and in all things and all people.
Give us hearts and minds that seek the face of Jesus,
And help us, through the power of the Holy Spirit,
To be always grateful for your blessings,
For the gracious gift of Your Presence.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ
In the unity of your Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Reading suggestions

Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (On the Call to Holiness in Today’s World), 19 March 2018, a letter of encouragement to the Church, described by the Holy Father in this way: ‘My modest goal is to repurpose the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time, with all its risks, challenges and opportunities’. In a world of soundbites, it is a real help to read what the Holy Father has to say to us in his own words.

Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei* (The Light of Faith), 29 June 2013. This was Pope Francis’ first great letter to the Church and is a good resource for prayer and reflection on our faith in the life of the Church and our world.