

# The living Faith of the Church

What do we mean by the 'living Faith' of the Church?

## Belief and Faith

Although we often use the two words interchangeably, 'belief' and 'faith' are not the same thing. We can believe something yet remain personally unaffected by it: we can believe 'facts' or 'ideas'.

But faith involves us personally: it engages our whole being; it directs not just our thinking, but our way of living. We have faith in a person; we believe a thing.

## A personal invitation

This is why the call to Faith is personal. It demands more of us than simply 'intellectual assent'. Faith is not a matter of believing things *about* God – it is a matter of having Faith *in* God, allowing ourselves to be changed in how we live and how we see things.

Practically speaking, this can be seen in how we live as a parish community and the values that we hold and share with others.

This is why it is true to say that 'we are never called alone'. We are called to belong to one another in Faith and Christian Love (also called 'Charity', which means more than simply 'giving to others'). As Paul the Apostle taught:

*For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.<sup>1</sup>*

This Body of Christ exists not just in our own time, our own community: it exists always and everywhere. This is why we remember and pray for the Church throughout the world, for the needs of all, and why we are united in God's Spirit with all baptised Christians, those who have come before us and those who follow. This is the true meaning of the communion of saints.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 12:4-8. See also 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

<sup>2</sup> Saints, although it has come to mean particular Christian women and men who have lived deeply the life of Faith, actually means all the Christian faithful

## Faith shared

Faith is never a matter of private belief. Private beliefs do not transform the world, they do not build community or express love.

When Faith is **shared** in Christian Charity, God's Spirit is at work. It is not we ourselves who witness, but the Spirit speaking through us. So when we do not know what to say, Jesus promised:

*do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.<sup>3</sup>*

God's Spirit speaks through the Church from one generation to the next, so that the message of Christ our Saviour is handed-on in word and action, through Scripture and Tradition. This is God's Work, the fulfilment of God's Promise to Abraham which was handed-on from generation to generation, to Moses leading Israel out of slavery and onwards to the Revelation of Jesus in his life, death and resurrection, the sending out of the apostles, and the handing-on of our Faith through to our own time.

## Our Faith and those who have lived it

The Church is the Promised People of God. It is not a thing; it is humankind called together by God's Spirit, living together in Faith as one Body, belonging one to all.

The example of saints and other holy men and women inspires us to live as Christians in our own time and guides us on how to face the many difficult choices and challenges we encounter. **We are not alone:** we belong to one another as God's People throughout the world and throughout time. When we feel weak, we can find strength in our belonging to the Church, in our shared Faith and in knowing that God's Spirit is among us always.

We share **one** Profession of Faith with all Christians of Eastern ('Orthodox') and Western ('Reformation' or 'Protestant') traditions. We also share one Baptism with them, being baptised 'in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit'. This is why, on the *Journey in Faith* (RCIA), Christians from other denominations who wish to become Catholics are not baptised again if they have been validly baptised.<sup>4</sup> Those who wish to be received into the Church from non-Christian faiths, or who have never been baptised, will receive both Baptism and Confirmation when they are received into the Church.

## For Your Reflection

In your own experience, what have you seen and heard that tells you that Catholic Faith is the *living Faith* of the Church?

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 10:19-20

<sup>4</sup> Though they may still need to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation if they have not yet received it