

PART TWO: Faith of the Heart

For Father Chaminade, faith is the basis of everything in our life. Our call to live Marianist spirituality is first of all a call to live by faith. What does this mean in practice?

MIND

Faith makes real for us things that before were not real. This takes place in one way in our mind and in another way in our heart.

First, faith means to accept with our mind something as true or as a fact we cannot prove. It means accepting with our mind something which we cannot demonstrate by reason and which our senses cannot directly experience. We accept it as true because we place confidence in someone who told us about it – not because we understand it or because we have proof of it. In Zeffirelli's film, *Jesus of Nazareth*, the women told the apostles Jesus was risen, the reaction was disbelief. Finally, the focus was on Peter. Did he believe? He nodded his head. But how could he believe that Jesus had risen? "Because he said he would." Our belief is a matter of trust much more than of insight.

Occasionally we might have an experience of something we believe; we then have our experience as assurance. An American journalist went to Medjugorje for a story about apparitions, but she did not go as a believer. She had had a miscarriage, and she was deeply depressed. At the end of one day in Medjugorje, she accepted the situation with profound peace. Her inner transformation was so profound that she became a witness to the grace of Medjugorje. Her experience was her assurance.

But once an experience has passed and fades, we must again accept a truth by faith. In other words, we are usually in contact with the realities of our inner spiritual life not directly through experience, but indirectly through believing. Without an exceptional mystical grace, only in heaven will we directly grasp those things which we now take hold of by believing. As Saint Paul says "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part: then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known" 1 Cor 13:12. Experience gives us a certainty about what we know. As we said above, if the experience is passing or fades, we must again live by pure faith.

On Christmas in 1982, the Mother of God brought to an end her daily appearances to one of the girls in Medjugorje. Mary explained that she would no longer visit her daily as she had been doing: now this young girl, who had been favored by a daily experience of Mary, would again have to live by faith, “like all the other Christians.” Once the direct experience of Mary stopped, her presence could be lived only in faith. Saint Bernadette experienced our Blessed Lady at Lourdes. Toward the end of her life, cancer invaded her body and affected her memory. She could no longer remember details about the visions. Consequently, she had strong temptations to doubt the appearances of our Blessed Mother to her at Lourdes. The direct experience was past, so she had to hold on to the reality in a purified faith.

Faith of the mind makes something real for us through assent, without rational proof or scientific demonstration. It enlarges our world of reality and enriches the life of our spirit.

METHOD OF THE HEART

Faith of the heart is the foundation for forming the “new self” in Jesus, because it brings about a change in our thinking and in our feeling. To make our faith effective, Father Chaminade gave us a method for exercising faith of the heart. As a help to practicing faith of the heart, here is an analysis of the elements of this method. Let me present the first part in this section and the other two in the next.

FIRST, I must be clear about the *content of my faith*. What precisely do I believe? How do I feel about it? What is in my mind? How are my emotions concerning this particular matter? I will take an example from my own life. Do I really believe that Jesus has called me to be a member of the Society of Mary (or the other branches of the *Family of Mary*: Daughter of Mary, Lay Marianists, Alliance, Affiliate)?

If I believe with my mind, my answer is the following: “Yes, I believe God wants me to be a member in the (*Family of Mary*).” But I might also find myself saying, “Yes...I think so...but I am not really sure...” In such a case, my faith is weakened by doubts. Finally, I must conclude that I do not believe if I answer, “I really don’t know.” In any case, I need to give a clear answer of what I accept as true.

However, my answer should not only be what I accept with my mind but also how I feel about it. For example, I might be convinced that God has called me to be a member of the *Family of Mary*, but I might not be happy about it. This means I have accepted the truth with my mind, but I am rejecting or opposing it with my heart. I believe with my mind but not yet with my heart. When I make an act of faith of the heart, I give consent with my mind, and I embrace the truth with my feelings. If I accept a truth with my mind but resist it with my heart, I will not change or act on it. This is why Father Chaminade maintained that only faith of the heart is a faith that transforms us and moves us to action.

*We will continue in the next section and look at **HEART**.*