

## CHAPTER 1

# FAITH AND LIFE



Albert Einstein (1879 – 1955) was one of the greatest scientists of 20<sup>th</sup> century. He became famous as the proponent of the theory of relativity. It was he who got the Nobel Prize for physics in 1921. Einstein, a true believer in God, found time to pray while he was conducting research in Mathematics. There is an incident, which reveals the truth.

While Einstein was professor at Saris Federal polytechnic, he spent more time in research than in teaching. Still he generously helped the college students who came to his house to solve certain doubts related to science. One of the rooms in his house was a classroom for them.

One day when the students came to his house, Einstein was not in his classroom. When they asked, his wife replied that he was praying and that he will come after some time. Some of the students did not believe it. They were surprised. One of them wrote on the board with a piece of chalk that “God is nowhere”. When Einstein came after some time, he observed the sentence on the board. He took the same piece of chalk and drew a line between now and here with great serenity. Then the sentence became “God is now here”. Thus he expressed his faith.

History teaches that many scientists who conducted experiments on cosmos and cosmic mysteries have grown in faith. Scientists like Albert Einstein, Louis Pasteur, André-Marie Ampère are among the best known scientists who had great faith in the God the creator of the universe. The more we study about stars, satellites and the creatures therein, the more humbly, we study with great wonder and bowed head before the work of God. Every being in this universe really brings us closer to God and help us to grow in our faith in God.

## **Man in Search of God**

Each person created in the image and likeness of God has a profound desire in his heart to seek and find God. Through this desire written in the heart of every person, God invites man to a love relationship with Him. This longing embedded in the heart of man at the moment of creation is a gift of the creator. The famous words of St. Augustine – who lived in the 4<sup>th</sup> century has clearly manifested this intense longing of man for God. “O God, you created me for you. My soul will be restless until it becomes one with you”.

It is God Himself who answers man's search for God fully. The invisible God lovingly reveals Himself through the creatures and created things. Throughout history we see God who reveals Himself. God's self-manifestation is God's self-revelation through His words and actions. We see the perfection of all revelation in Christ. “In these last days, he has spoken to us by a son” (Heb 1: 2). Hence, Christ, the word of God who took up flesh is the perfection of Divine revelation. (4).

### **Faith: An Answer to Divine Revelation**

The invisible God, in the fullness of His love, speaks to us, invites us to His friendship and welcomes us through His Divine revelation. It is the only true God revealed as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit thus invites us and welcomes us to this loving relationship with Him. We receive this invitation entirely through Jesus Christ the incarnate word of God. Faith is the response of man surrendering himself to God who revealed Himself through Jesus Christ. We call this response faith. (Catechism of the catholic Church 142, 143) or Faith is the response to this call.

The total picture of response man should give to God's revelation is Jesus Christ Himself who surrendered Himself on the cross as a sacrifice. This model of Jesus enables us to surrender ourselves totally to God, to accept unconditionally whatever is revealed through Him and obey Him. Best examples of such self surrender are our forefather Abraham and Bl. Virgin Mary, the mother of God.

### **Abraham: “the Father of the Faithful”**

God gave a special call to Abraham, the son of Terah, belonging to the tribe of Noah, the just, and set him apart to save man who failed to respond to the divine revelation. The letter to the Hebrews gives special emphasis to the faith of Abraham. “ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance., and he set out, not knowing where he was going” (Heb 11:8). By faith he lived in the promised land as an alien, a stranger and a pilgrim (Gen 23:4). Though aged, Sarah received the grace to conceive the promised son by faith. (Gen 21:2). By faith Abraham was ready to sacrifice his only son Isaac. Thus he became the father

of all faithful or believers (Gen. 22). God formed a special set of people through Isaac and his son Jacob (Rom 4:16). The letter to the Hebrews defines faith thus: "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb 11:1). This was realized in Abraham.

### **Mary: "the Blessed that Believed"**

The full picture of obedient faith is Blessed Virgin Mary. Mary who believed that nothing is impossible for God and who gave her consent saying "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38) received with faith God's message and promise given through angel Gabriel. In the Old Testament Eve acted against divine revelation, whereas, contrary to that, Mary surrendered herself totally to the divine will. Elizabeth Quoted Mary saying "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord" (Lk. 1:45). Because of this faith, all generations call Bl. Virgin Mary "Blessed".

Mary has a very important role in the salvation act. She gives silent witness to faith in the fulfillment of Jesus' mission. She remained firm in her faith throughout her life even in the last trial of the death of her son, Jesus, on the cross. Hence, Church reverences her as the pure realization of faith (CCC 149).

### **Characteristics of Faith**

#### **1. Faith - a Gift of God.**

Faith is a gift of God. It is a supernatural virtue given to man by God. When Peter declared that Jesus was Christ, the Son of the living God, He said "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven" (Mt.16:17). From this Jesus makes us understand that faith does not derive from human talents but that it is a gift of the Heavenly Father. "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him" (Mt.11:27). "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (Jn. 1:18). It is the Holy Spirit that leads human hearts to God. God's grace and the help of the Holy Spirit are necessary to inspire human beings to put faith into action (CCC 153).

#### **2. Faith- a Human Act**

Though faith is a gift of God, still, it is a human act. It is befitting to human reason and freedom to depend on God and to embrace the truth revealed by Him. Even human relationships are sustained by mutual trust. If so, when a man surrenders totally his intellect and thought to God who reveals Himself and get united with Him in the interior, human dignity is elevated. St. Thomas

Aquinas says: “faith is the act of the intellect surrendering itself to divine revelation, obeying the command of the will, by grace” (*Summa Theologica* II-II, 2, 9).

### **3. Faith- a Gift Perfects Reason**

It is quite natural for a man who believes in God to desire to know God more and more and to understand more deeply the truth God has revealed. Faith helps to perfect the knowledge that man discovers through his own intelligence. All that God reveals may not be understandable to human intelligence. But we believe because it is revealed by God. Man makes up the insufficiency of his knowledge by faith and attains perfect wisdom. In the words of St. Augustine, we may summarise the relation between faith and reason thus: I believe so that I may understand and I understand so that I may believe.

### **4. Faith - the Beginning of Eternal Life**

In this earthly pilgrimage faith enables us to enjoy in anticipation the light and joy of heaven, our destination. St. Paul teaches us: “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face” (1cor. 13:12). St. Paul again reminds us that now we are led not by sight but by faith (2Cor. 5:7). All of us live in this world with the hope of the heavenly glory that we expect to attain. Hence, we have already begun eternal life by our faith (CCC 163).

### **5. Faith – A Gift to be Protected Daily**

Today, faith may be liable to various tests. Today we live in a milieu where we are challenged and tortured in the name of faith. Hence, constant effort is required to continue in faith until death. “For we have become partners of Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end” (Heb 3:14). Life of faith is a pilgrimage. In this pilgrimage there may be many crises and temptations. Hence we must be very careful to safeguard the gift of faith.

## **Themes of Faith**

The basis of faith is the mysteries, which God has revealed. We are bound to believe because God who can never cheat or be cheated reveals these truths. In the creed, we proclaim the subjects of faith, which contains revealed Divine truths.

### **1. Faith in the Holy Trinity**

The most important among the mysteries of faith in the Church is the faith in the Holy Trinity. It is the faith in God, the Almighty Father, and Jesus Christ, His only Son and in the Holy Spirit, the life - giver. The mystery of the Holy Trinity is revealed to us in its totality through Jesus the Son of

God. We have received baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We are called to share in the communion of the Holy Trinity by the grace we receive in baptism.

## **2. Faith in the Catholic Church**

Among the mysteries of the Church, another important subject of faith is faith in the Catholic Church. In the creed, we declare that we believe in the only, holy, apostolic and universal church. This church is the people of God, the mystical body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Jesus has entrusted the church to continue His mission of salvation. Church continuous this mission through proclamation of the Gospel, and ministration of the sacraments and pastoral ministries. Jesus has given the authority to the church to teach and interpret the word of God authentically (CCC 751).

## **3. Faith in Eternal life**

Another mystery in Christian faith is faith in eternal life. The church believes that there is eternal life after death and each one will have heaven or hell in eternity according to his/her life in the world. This faith in heavenly life enables us to live hopefully in the midst of sufferings and sorrows in this world (CCC 1020).

### **Levels of Faith – in Life**

Faith, a divine gift, grows through each one's life. In a person's life, each circumstance and experience he goes through may kindle or dim the fire of faith which God has placed in his interior recesses. But no one can take away one's spirit of faith completely. The varied dimensions of life witness express the levels of the growth of faith.

#### **1. Church Level**

Faith life grows, gets empowered and bears fruit in the only, holy, apostolic and Catholic Church. This process is possible through regular listening to the word of God, reception of the sacraments and a life-style based on the commandments of God. Only a person who grows in ecclesial life style can be a model of perfect Christian life. This ecclesial dimension has to be adjusted with the social environment. In this sense, the participation in the Holy Mass in communion with the parish community and other pious activities are essential for the growth of faith.

#### **2. Family Level**

Faith is handed over to the next generation in the family, the home church. Faith transferred

through parents, brothers and sisters, strengthens one in faith. A person is given a sense of direction in life through the strength of faith transferred paternally. When parents, brothers, sisters and relatives become witnesses of profound faith, children will grow as successors of this faith.

### **3. Personal Level**

True personal life is a clear reflection of deep faith. The ways of growth and the experiences therein, the convictions formed out of these experiences and life-witnesses are factors of persuasion and inspiration in an individual's faith-formation. One becomes a believer when the roots of faith go deeper and a weak believer when the roots of faith become stagnant and a non-believer, which the root is no more present.

### **4. Community Level**

Community is as powerfully influential as family. Personalities capable of becoming models to man, as a social being will give inspiration to faith-life. Life style of spiritual persons founded on faith is capable of awakening man's social consciousness. In addition to that, our lives rooted in faith will be an inspiration for many to lead a good life.

Faith will empower us in this life, lasting from birth to death. Life full of Faith has great significance beyond our short-term joys and sorrows. True faith leads us to the light of realization that nothing is impossible for God, even when we feel that all possibilities are over and there is no more hope. When we live in accordance with our faith, a gift of God, we will feel the pre- experience of eternal life, here on Earth. We may be tempted to give up faith in adverse circumstances. But when we proceed with profound faith in our daily life, faith really becomes our lives and our lives become faith in action.

## **I. Find out the Answers**

1. Faith is the answer man offers to God. Elucidate.
2. “Abraham is the Father of all believers”. Describe.
3. Substantiate that Mary is the perfect model of obedience in faith.
4. What are the characteristics of faith?
5. Enumerate different levels of faith-life.

## **II. Let us Discuss**

1. What will be your stand when you are tempted to give up faith to attain your goals?
2. “It is enough you choose a religion only after you become an adult”, what is your reaction to this statement?

## **III. Activity**

I will lead my friend to true faith by sharing my experience in faith.

## **IV. Let us Enlighten our Hearts**

“Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31).