



Rembrandt, *Christ Preaching*, c. 1643/1649

When one looks at the teaching of Our Lord in the Gospels as a whole, one finds that there are few things He praises more than faith. Our Lord wouldn't praise faith unless there was some great excellence involved in the act of faith, in believing. The saying of our Lord "Your faith has made you well; go in peace" or "Your faith has saved you" runs like a refrain throughout the Gospels. In general, the New Testament makes clear that without faith there is no justification; without faith we cannot be right with God.

I would like to offer a little reflection on the question of why it is that this act of faith is so foundational and so indispensable in our relationship with God. What is it about faith that makes it so fundamental, so important, so essential? Why do our Lord and the New Testament writers make so much of faith?

In order to understand why faith is so essential we have to go back to the original order established by God when He created man. When God created Adam, Adam's lower nature, especially his lower appetites, his emotions and passions, were perfectly ruled by his higher nature, that is, by his intellect and will. God made us such that our reason is supposed to govern our lower nature. And then, in

addition to this, Adam's reason was subjected to, and in perfect harmony with, God's intellect. So there was this perfect harmony in creation where Adam's lower nature was ruled by his higher nature, and his higher nature was ruled by God.

But when Adam sinned in the Garden, his reason rebelled against God; his reason refused to submit to God; it refused to believe and trust in what God had commanded him about the fruit of the tree of good and evil. As a consequence of Adam's reason rebelling against God, his lower nature began to rebel against his reason. The preternatural gift by means of which Adam's lower nature was perfectly obedient to his higher nature was taken away from him. As a result we now have a fundamental disorder in creation because of the rebellion of sin.

In order to re-establish this order the first and most important thing man has to do is once again to submit his mind to the mind of God and this is only possible by means of the virtue of faith. By faith we submit our very small, very limited minds to the great mind of God. There can be no order within ourselves and there can be no order in creation unless we submit our minds to the greater light and greater mind of God. And that is one

reason why faith is something absolutely necessary for man in his relation to God.

But there is another reason why faith is important and indispensable for us. This has to do with the fact that God did something very strange when He created man (and when He created the angels as well). The strange thing that God did was that He created us for an end, for a purpose, that exceeds the capacity of our natures. In other words, He created man for a supernatural end. Now in order to understand a little better and perhaps more clearly what this means we have to think a bit about the supernatural; we have to consider a little more closely what we mean by the supernatural.

We come to an understanding of the supernatural through our understanding of nature; and we come to the knowledge of the nature of things principally by what things can do. We see that plants can do things that rocks and minerals can't do. Plants have the ability to take in nourishment and to grow and to reproduce. Rocks and minerals can't do those things and so we say that plants have a different nature than rocks; they have a higher nature. But then animals can do things that plants can't do; they have at least the sense of touch and the higher animals have the power of locomotion and the higher sense powers by which they can see and hear and taste and smell like we do. Plants can't do these things and so we say that animals have a higher nature than plants. But we humans can do things that the animals can't do—we have reason, we have minds that can think.

Now, if you were in your garden one day and you saw one of your plants pull itself up by the roots and walk over to another part of the garden and dig a hole and replant itself, you would be amazed because plants do not naturally have the ability to do those things. In other words, if a plant were to do that, it would be doing something “supernatural;” it would be doing something above its nature. And, in fact, if a plant did do that, it really wouldn't be a plant anymore, it would be an animal. It would in some way possess or somehow share in the higher nature of “animality.” And likewise, if one day your dog started talking to you and telling you jokes, you would be amazed. Your dog would, in

that case, be doing something “supernatural.” In fact, your dog couldn't talk to you and tell you jokes unless he had an intellect, and if he had an intellect he wouldn't really be a dog anymore, he would be a man.

Now the strange thing that God did when He created man was that He created him for an activity and an end which exceeds the capacity of his nature. In other words, He created him for a supernatural end. He made man so that he could actually do things that are proper to a higher nature; things that are proper to the divine nature, to the nature of God Himself. But, as we saw in our previous examples, in order for man to do things that are proper to God, it would be necessary for him to become God in some way.

With this explanation we can perhaps understand a little better the saying of the Fathers of the Church that are frequently cited: “God became man so that man could become divine.” Of course, we don't become God **essentially**, but we become divine by means of **participation**. And that is what grace is—it is a created participation in the very life of God and it gives us the ability to do things that are proper to the divine nature. In fact, that is one way to understand the theological virtues: faith gives us a participation in the very knowledge of God, knowledge that is proper to

Him; charity gives us the ability to love with God's very love.

So God creates us for an end that exceeds the capacity of our nature. But since we are rational and free creatures, we can only reach our end by first knowing it and then freely pursuing it. And so, in order to reach our end, we have to know it. But since our end is supernatural it can only be known by revelation that is accepted by means of faith. And that is another reason why faith is so essential and indispensable. Those who do not have the light of faith cannot know with clarity why they exist; they cannot know what their goal is and so they cannot direct themselves to that goal. And so, blessed are you, if not having seen, you believe in all God has revealed. “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” ❖

