



Cleansed and Fed: The Sacraments Promote Good Theology

THE DOCTRINE OF FAITH

First, some definitions:

- Theology
- Doctrine



Respond to this charge:

A study of Christian doctrine may be interesting, but it's not especially relevant to every-day life.

The Nature of Faith

Romans 3:21-22

²¹ But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Prove the following statements from the passages above:

- Faith is not a work of man.
- Faith is not an active decision of our own free will.
- Faith is not a condition we must fulfill before our salvation is complete.

The Formula of Concord (1577):

For faith does not justify because it is so good a work and so God-pleasing a virtue, but because it lays hold of and accepts the merit of Christ in the promise of the holy gospel. (SD, III 13)

Evaluate: "I'm going to heaven because I'm a believer in Jesus."

So then, what *is* faith? Use the following passages to provide a three-fold answer:

2 Peter 1:2

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

Faith is _____.

1 Corinthians 12:3

No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

Faith is _____.

John 14:1

[Jesus said,] "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me."

Faith is _____.

If we slip into thinking that faith is merely an intellectual exercise, how will this affect the way we listen to sermons?

How can the sacraments help to encourage a proper view of faith?

Sing or say the following hymn stanza together.

Faith is a living power from heaven
That grasps the promise God has given,
A trust that cannot be o'erthrown,
Fixed heartily on Christ alone.

*Petrus Herbert
Christian Worship Hymn 404, s.1*

The Source of Faith

2 Corinthians 4:5-7

⁵ For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

What does Paul mean when he says, "We do not preach ourselves"?

Who are the "jars of clay"? What point is Paul making?

What kind of "power" is Paul speaking of in verse 7?

Evaluate: "Our congregation is strong because of the gifts and abilities of the called workers who serve us."

How can the God-given rituals of Baptism and Communion help us to understand the role a pastor may play in our life of faith?

Sing or say the following hymn stanzas together.

Faith finds in Christ whate'er we need
To save or strengthen us indeed,
Receiving grace from heaven's throne
And humbly sharing cross and crown.

Faith in the Savior brings us peace
And bids the mourner's weeping cease;
By faith the children's place we claim
And give all honor to one name.

Christian Worship Hymn 404, s.2,3

The Reason We Go To Church

“Nearly 22 inches of snow fell in Boston and more was expected, closing in on the 2003 record of 27.6 inches. The archdiocese in the heavily Roman Catholic city reminded parishioners that under church law, the requirement to attend Sunday Mass ‘does not apply when there is grave difficulty in fulfilling this obligation.’” (AP News, Boston, February 9, 2013).

When the weather is good, what motivation does the Boston archdiocese offer here for attending Sunday Mass? How will this kind of motivation lead a person to think about their relationship with God?

If we’ve been regular in our church attendance, we might slip into thinking that we don’t need much help with our faith anymore.

- How might this kind of thinking affect our desire to go to church and our expectations concerning how our attendance will benefit us?
- How might this kind of thinking affect the form and pattern we choose for worship?

How do the sacraments help restore a proper perspective? If attending church isn’t an obligation, then why do we go? Use the Small Catechism to answer:

“Baptism means that the old Adam (a.k.a. “sinful nature”) in us should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever” (SC IV).

“What is the Sacrament of Holy Communion? It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ for us Christians to eat and to drink” (SC VI).

Sing or say the following hymn stanzas together.

We thank you, then, O God of heav’n,
That you to us this faith have giv’n
Through mighty Word and Sacrament
To trust the one whom you have sent.

As you have promised, grant each soul
Its holy faith’s true end and goal:
The blessedness no foes destroy,
Eternal love and light and joy. *CW 404, s.4,5*