

SUNDAY CATECHISM / 3

Being disposed to the act of faith

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Sunday Catechism



In this third lesson we want to understand how will and intellect can be disposed to the act of faith; or, if they already adhere to the faith, how they can increase the faith.

We begin by considering our intellectual faculty, remembering what has been said and repeated according to the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas: faith is an act of the

intellect that adheres; we must not think that this noble faculty is alien to the act of faith.

Let us ponder first of all on the preparation for the act of faith.

What does it mean to prepare our intelligence for the act of faith?

Depending on the particular characteristics of our intelligence, the act of faith becomes easier or more difficult, in relation to the intellect. We mustn't forget that the impulse for the act of faith is always previously given by the Grace of God and yet this grace of God does not exclude the need for human action. Today we are concerned with this action, keeping in mind the primacy of grace that was referred to in the last lesson.

With regards to the predisposition of the intellect, apologetics is of considerable importance.

- What is apologetics?

It is giving the reasons for believing and the defence of these reasons. Why does apologetics continue to be important? Because sound apologetics can help remove the causes, deficiencies, difficulties that block or mislead the human intellect.

There are different examples of these difficulties. Let us consider, for example, when a solid historical truth is re-established, free of ideologies, which exposes the many errors or wickedness attributed to Christians and the Church as not truthful. It helps to re-evaluate the Church and her message.

Let's reconsider how useful it can be to understand that the reasons that lead to the act of faith are important: the act of faith is not the act of a fool, or of one who stops reasoning and opens up to faith.

Apologetics in this sense helps to dispose; it does not give rise to faith, because faith is born when grace touches the person. And yet the human part of being open to truth, of removing errors, of deepening motivations and reasons, has its weight. Conversion, that is adherence to the faith can happen for many reasons, yet there is always an aspect that strikes the intellect and frees it from a cage of errors. It could be witnessing a miracle, or after a more reasoned and serene contemplation of miracles, of prophecies ... there are many paths; for this reason it is important to cultivate apologetics and divulge it.

Note, this is true in the same way misjudgments about the Church, the Gospels, the person of Christ, etc., distance people from the faith.

For those who have already made the act of faith, for those who adhere to God in faith, the fundamental principle remains, faith must be strengthened.

This leads us to an important aspect to be understood: the real object of our intellect, what's the good for our intellect, is the truth. This means that the more we advance in knowledge of the truth, the more our intellect is perfected; the more we remove the darkness of error and confusion, the more we remove the imperfection of ignorance from our intelligence. Ignorance is an evil that afflicts the intellect. This does not mean that everyone must know everything to whatever degree, but it is true that each of us is required to do everything we can, so that our intelligence is educated, is receptive to the truth according to its full potential, which can be less for some and yet more for others, the important thing is to aim for the perfection of one's intelligence, which is a gift from God.

Ignorance is not a virtue, it is not good for the intellect and it is absolutely not true that knowing less about the truths that God has revealed to us is a condition that helps us to remain humble. It's not true. Humility has to do with each one's disposition, which we will come to in the next episodes, but that mistaken correspondence between intellectual perfection and pride on the one hand, and intellectual imperfection and therefore humility on the other, simply does not exist. The intellect was given to us by God to be receptive to the truth and according to the potential of each person's capabilities.

The divine mysteries surpass human intelligence, surpass mankind's capabilities and also human capacity raised by grace, because God is God and is infinite, while our intelligence is finite. And yet it is possible to progress in the knowledge of the mysteries, through the light of faith, also aided by the light of reason, and this knowledge is fruitful: fields of inquiry open up which enrich the person, confirming them in the profound truth of their faith and quench their thirst in the fountain of revealed truth.

- What can we say instead about the will?

To be disposed to the faith, but also to maintain it and strengthen it, it is important to remove the defect, the imperfection of the will. Just as the intellect has its imperfection in ignorance or in erroneous knowledge and its perfection, its good, is the knowledge of the truth, similarly the will also has its own perfection and imperfection.

The will has as its objective, as its fulfilment, the choice of good and therefore virtue, which is an inclination that is rooted in the human will towards good. Its imperfection will therefore be vices, the so-called capital sins or passions.

In the Western tradition they are classified as the seven deadly sins as we find them

in the work *Moralia in Job* by St. Gregory the Great: pride, avarice, lust, anger, gluttony, envy and sloth.

The oriental tradition is based instead on the classification that Evagrius Ponticus gives in his *Treatise on Monastic Life* and it deals with eight passions or spirits of evil: gastimargía (throat), pornéia (lust), filargiría (which is the set of avarice and greed), sadness, anger, sloth, cenodoxy (vainglory) and finally pride.

These unregulated behaviours clearly affect the will's activity and consequently affect the act of faith negatively as well. Working on the will, therefore is important, because the more vicious the will, the more it is restrained in the act of faith. Similarly, the more vicious the will, the more the faith is in danger, as unregulated passions can take over which can slow down or make the faith regress. And very often it is just the lack of attention to these passions, the superficiality in recognising and not fighting against these rooted deadly sins - perhaps not even particularly noticeable, but which grow without us realising it - at the origin of the loss of faith. We don't realise that we have allowed these passions, these vices to gain ground, to extend their tentacles to our will, to the point of blocking it and leading it where it shouldn't go.

So it is clear that in the life of faith we must mature in all these aspects:

1 - The truths revealed.

2 - The firmness, the certainty with which our intellect knows the revealed truth and adheres to it.

3 - The readiness of the will to abandon oneself to God, to entrust oneself to God, to trust in God who reveals Himself.