

ACT of FAITH: Recollection fr. Marie Laurent, ocd

An Act of Faith is believing without seeing. When we pray the Our Father for example, we unconsciously turn towards God; we make an **act of faith** and God comes. He is there with us at that moment. The same thing occurs with St. Teresa, we turn and pray to her, one can only suppose that she is listening, that she is there and hears what we are saying. In other words, we turn towards God, we turn towards St. Teresa, and they are there for us!

Through an **act of faith** my relationship with God begins, develops and grows. It is the **ABSOLUTE basis** of the Christian life.

In the Gospels, the **goal** of Jesus was to open the doors of faith. He allowed the person to **open to faith** and then to **make an act of faith**, the **foundation** for all that would follow.

When he was speaking to a crowd or to an individual his goal was always to allow the person (s) listening to him to make an act of faith. Jesus said that to be able to work **miracles** faith was **essential**. He was unable to work miracles in Nazareth due to their **lack of faith**.

When we make an act of faith, we open the doors of faith and God comes in. It may seem insignificant, but an act of faith allows us to **enter a relationship with Christ**.

If we allow the Holy Spirit to develop our faith, our relationship with Christ deepens and we become **mystics**. A mystic isn't someone who levitates 50 cm., but someone who has a **real relationship** with Christ. Through the action of the Holy Spirit our capacity to make acts of faith or to practice the virtue of faith develops. We are **all called to be mystics**.

What is The Act of Believing (Faith)?

How do we enter a relationship with God who is part of the immaterial world and doesn't have senses?

There is a **canyon** between God and us, between the Creator and the Created, but we are completely dependent on God for Life. If He withdrew His support, we would vanish. But, no one has vanished which shows the **universal love of God** for his creatures.

He invites us into a **2-way relationship**. We must **first however overcome the obvious**. We can't see him with our bodily senses, so he puts the capacity to interact with him into the **soul at Baptism**. The soul of man separates him from animals.

He gives us the ability to **know** the immaterial world for us to come to **know** Him and then puts the **Theological Virtues** (faith hope charity) into man's soul at Baptism to allow man to enter a relationship with Him.

God permits us to make **an act of faith, a choice to believe without seeing**, to enter into a relationship with Him, **but** we must **exercise it**.

Analyzing the Act of Faith:

What happens when I say I believe in the Trinity? I can't really grasp the concept of the Trinity; it goes way beyond my intelligence. **Example:** Let's take a Mathematical Theorem: the teacher says it is true, it must be true, I believe the teacher, I understood the explanation, so it must be so.

And faith? God is one and three at the same time, but I can't prove it like I can prove a mathematical theorem. I just trust God and the Church. I have faith. But something is missing.

Why should I trust? When I make an act of faith, the **Lord comes and firms up my faith**. If I open my will to God, he comes, lives in me, transforms me and enables me to do the impossible with confidence. I have a strong and peaceful certitude in Him like the martyrs. He transforms me completely which is his way of communicating with me.

Example of an Act of Faith: Rev 3:20 I stand at the door and knock, if anyone opens to me I will come in and dine with him and he with Me.

Commentary: I open the door, I accept to believe, the Lord comes in; the meal is a reciprocal relationship (2 way) with the Lord; ... the meal nourishes me, it transforms me.

Conclusion

An act of faith depends on **my initiative** then God can take over. I decide. If I choose to believe, or make an act of Faith, God will give me the strength to do so. The general capacity to do so is given to me at Baptism.

An act of faith is not necessarily comfortable. It is an act of my soul and so can have repercussions in my body. It can be painful because of spiritual combat or because an act of faith is supernatural. God can come in a strong and close way. I am not used to it. It can be uncomfortable. So, prayer time can sometimes be a struggle.

St. Jean of the Cross' celebrated formula: Faith is the only way in my control to enter union with God. The only way to enter a relationship with God. Faith is the

only, the unique way for me to obtain grace and achieve union with God.

If faith is the ONLY door to mystical life, what will I do?

St. Teresa of Avila, who lived from 1515-82, strove to live in the presence of God within her. For 12 years she spent time in the parlor with a courtesan. She converted through God's grace and began having mystical experiences.

Recollection was the name Teresa gave to the exercise of the **act of faith** that **changed her life**. She was told that Jesus was next to **her** or within her and that she should **consider (act of faith)** him. She should turn her interior attention to Him, look at Him with the eyes of the soul. This is an **Act of Faith**.

She was in the country at the time with a **book**, The Third Spiritual Alphabet written by Osuna, a Franciscan. She would practice what it said two hours daily, morning and night. She would turn towards Jesus within her, when she did, Jesus would come to her. She didn't see anything. Jesus gave Himself to her and this transformed her.

She started noticing little '**flowers of virtue**': she was becoming **more patient**, better able to tolerate her illness (she was completely paralyzed except for the little finger on her right hand). She was a talker and too much talking leads to **gossip**. She decided not to say anything bad about anyone who wasn't there. Jesus granted her this virtue. The grace of God transformed her.

Teresa made the connection between **prayer without ceasing** and **recollection**. The Carmel's Rule of Albert instructs one to stay next to one's cell and to practice prayer or meditate on the law of God night and day. Prayer without ceasing is the heart of Carmelite life. Teresa wondered however how she could practice prayer without ceasing with all her responsibilities.

She realized though that she could practice **prayer without ceasing** by always being **attentive to Jesus**. It transformed her. She discovered an intimate relationship with Christ that we are ALL made for through recollection or turning towards Christ during the day. She always strove to be attentive to Him. What he did for Teresa he will do for you (The Life of Teresa of Avila, Marcelle Au Clair).

How can I practice prayer without ceasing as I have a very busy life? (31)

Teresa founded 17 convents. She had abundant problems **Example:** She had to convince the Vicar of Toledo to change his mind about founding a monastery that he had categorically refused to do. She was able to see him. She wasn't thinking about Jesus but rather about what to say to this man! She would rather have avoided this encounter, but the Lord had asked her open a monastery there. She was seeking to do God's will.

What is an Act of faith: it is an act of my liberty or my will which encompasses both an act of charity and an act of faith which both operate the same way. Teresa let go of her attention on Jesus (recollection) to do **God's will** and talk to the Vicar of Toledo...she made an act of charity (works). They (acts of faith and charity) are both acts of liberty of the will. Teresa gave the freedom of her will to Jesus.

Example: Passage 5th Mansion 3:11...Teresa talks about people who are afraid of moving during prayer for fear of losing a bit of the pleasure of recollection BUT God wants works from us not our pleasure. For Teresa the Vicar General had to be confronted to do God's will. It is NOT about my pleasure in prayer but about service to others (acts of charity).

The challenge is to **believe** (faith) and to **love** (charity) in each moment of our life. It is about making our lives an **inward journey**. In an **act of charity (works)**, I open myself to God, to love and believe in each instant of my daily life.

Teresa's teaching is really about putting into practice the **Sermon on the Mount** (Matt chap 5-7) I tell you that if your works don't go beyond those of the scribes and Pharisees you will not enter the Kingdom...don't kill...but I say don't be angry. In other words, don't be mad inside. It is **the root** of anger in my heart that needs to be healed by opening my heart to God's grace. I turn to Jesus all day long. This act of faith and/or charity, either one, brings peace to my heart as I look at Jesus. The idea of St. Teresa is to place all the acts of my life under the watchful eye of Jesus! Do everything as Jesus would have me do it!

Example: Don't parade your good works before man.... When you pray go in your closet, close the door... Matt. 6:5-6

How do I live this out daily? 3 (No! 4) Virtues of Teresa, four virtues:

0/ Continuous Prayer, practicing the **continuous presence of God** is the foundation. I turn towards Jesus, the source of all grace, during the day. I practice this exercise of faith.

1/ Humility: is the springboard for this exercise of faith (turning towards Jesus during the day). Humility is to walk in truth. The truth is that we are children of God. I need to realize the difference between God and myself. If I really grasp this difference I will have my eyes turned towards Him all day long. But we like to act like we are God. We need to give Him all our burdens. He will help us with them we have only to ask. He wants to carry them for us. His burden is light. Sometimes it can seem heavy, Lord! If we feel a burden is heavy it is because we haven't given it to God to carry!

Example: One of Teresa of Calcutta's sisters was complaining about having to teach the catechism to children. Teresa asked her who was in front Jesus or Simon of Cyrene when Jesus was carrying the Cross. We have just a little to carry behind Jesus for a short while. It is not up to us to worry about the direction or how a problematic situation will work out but only to welcome the Cross!

2/ Detachment: With each act of faith He comes in and transforms me. I recognize a problem (an act of detachment). I detach from myself when I ask the Lord to set me free from it. I must accept the idea that I am going to deprive myself of something I am doing. He wants to put something in the place of my behavior and I must let Him do just that! When I make an act of faith, Jesus comes to transform my will and my heart. I believe He will do it. Whenever we have doubts or faith challenges, the right prescription is to make an act of faith.

Example: DOUBT: The Virginity of the Blessed Virgin. If I have a problem believing that the Virgin Mary is really a Virgin. I can make an act of faith (universal solution): **Lord, I don't understand but I believe**". I can repeat that 50 times a day (or whenever the idea crosses my mind) for two weeks and my lack of faith, my doubt, will disappear. When He enters He sees all the obstacles to belief that I have and He heals them little by little. Repeating this **Act of Faith** many times daily actually **heals my intelligence by taking away the obstacles that kept me from Him. He perfects my intelligence**. I can ask for **insights** into the mystery. (spot lite)

Example: BAD HABIT like watching TV nightly: This is a choice but there is a struggle between the OLD man and the NEW man I am becoming. I must start out by accepting the idea of not watching TV every night. I am not able to stop watching television every night. I am hooked. I am incapable. I make an act of faith giving Christ access to my liberty: **'Lord, set me free from the television, please.'** I can see the problem and am willing to have my **will (heart) transformed by Christ** so that I can be **FREE!**

3/ Brotherly Love: I make an act of faith (recollection) and God comes with grace. The grace received in prayer must be then transmitted as charity in service to others (brotherly love). It is a **'fresh product'**, it must be consumed right now, it can't be 'saved', or it goes bad. It is like a cistern of fresh water, I must open the lower faucet to 'share the grace' or make an act of charity. I begin to turn in circles when I hoard the grace from prayer. I must **'open the lower faucet'** to share the grace or brotherly love (charity).

Example: Teresa knew her sisters hated to go upstairs at night after prayer and so would race out to the stairs to light their way with a lantern.

Example: Teresa would fold the white cloaks of her nuns.

Example: You can smile and/or make a gesture of kindness to someone to whom you are indifferent to (Neighbor).

When I am **lost in life and just** can't seem to find my way the answer is to render **service to someone else** or make an act of charity. Try it in small, tiny things. Don't miss an opportunity to demonstrate brotherly love by making an **act of charity**.

AMEN