

NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, 2025

"All these died in Faith. They did not receive what had been promised but saw it and greeted it from afar" (from today's second Reading, Hebrews 11: 1-2, 8-19)

We have two things here, Faith, which comes first, and then the Reality to which Faith points. Abraham and all of the other Old Testament Saints only had Faith during their earthly lives. The Saints in Heaven do not have Faith, because they fully possess the reality toward which Faith points, a share in divine Life. As Christians passing through this life, we do not fully possess the Reality, but neither do we only have Faith by itself. We also have a third thing, the PROMISE.

God's Promise is not just a word. God's Promise is a person, the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Lord Jesus said to His Apostles before His Ascension, "Behold, I send the PROMISE of my Father upon you" (Luke 24:49), and "Wait for the PROMISE of My Father, about which you have heard Me speak." (Acts 1:4) Following the Lord Jesus' instructions, and now filled with the Holy Spirit, St. Peter told the crowd on Pentecost Day "Repent and be baptized . . . for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit; for the PROMISE is for you and your children" (Acts 2:38-39) Similarly, St. Paul writes that we shall receive "the PROMISE of the Holy Spirit through Faith" (Galatians 3:14); and he taught about "the PROMISE by Faith of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 3:22).

We are now dealing with three things: Faith, the Reality promised by Faith, and the Promise of the Holy Spirit that prepares us to receive that full Reality. Faith comes first, but it must be followed by Justification, that is, by the change wrought within us by the work of the Holy Spirit. After Faith and Justification, comes the full reality of Salvation, delivery from sin and death and entry into a share in divine life.

Faith comes first, opening the door for Justification through the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. The presence and work of the Holy Spirit begin with Baptism. One may be baptized as an infant, of course. In that case, the Holy Spirit is conferred, but the work of Justification can only begin when someone has Faith, and Faith, St. Paul tells us, comes from hearing. That is why I am forbidden to baptize infants unless I have good reason to believe that, as they grow up, they will hear the word of Faith. Baptism is not a "welcome to the world" rite. It is the solemn conferral of the Holy Spirit of PROMISE, a conferral that will do those baptized no good if they never have the Faith that opens the door for God's PROMISE to be received. It is a beautiful thing to baptize infants when there is reasonable confidence that those raising them will make sure that they hear the words of Faith. When there isn't that confidence, it is best to wait for Baptism until someone hears and responds to the word of Faith.

God Himself is always Faithful. If a person comes to Faith, God will send him a messenger or apostle who will bring him to Baptism. Those whom the Lord calls to Faith, He justifies, in His time. His calling is sure and His Providence certain. Those whom He has called by Faith, He will bring to Justification through the Holy Spirit of Promise He has poured out upon His Church, though we may not the day or the hour. The day or the hour we may not know, but we do know that Salvation begins with Faith, and proceeds through Justification, the work of God's Holy Spirit dwelling within baptized believers.

It is vital for me to insist that Faith by itself, while necessary for Salvation, is not sufficient. It must be followed by Justification, the work of the Holy Spirit within us. We must cooperate with this work. We cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit by coming to the

Church for Baptism or, if we were baptized as infants, for Confirmation. We cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit by coming sincerely and humbly to listen to the Lord's word proclaimed in the Church, and to partake of the Lord's Supper, offered and received in the Church. In these ways, we allow the PROMISE we have received to change us little by little, to change us in such a way that we can receive the full Reality which Faith sees from afar and which the PROMISE of the Holy Spirit gradually makes present.

Faith comes first. Then justification is received through the Baptism and the other Sacraments of the Church. Faith is God's gift, and opens the door to justification. God is faithful to His gift, and those who have Faith will be justified, provided that they persevere in Faith. All of the Old Testament Saints had Faith, but they were not thereby justified. Justification begins with Jesus Christ, Who broke down the prison doors for the waiting Old Testament Saints, and Who gives the Spirit of Promise to His Church, for the Church to pour out upon the Faithful.

The Jewish rite of Circumcision was only an external sign of membership in the People of Israel. The Sacrament of Baptism is infinitely greater, the conferral of God's Holy Spirit. Circumcision was a sign of Faith only, whereas Baptism is the presence of God's living PROMISE, His Holy Spirit. The Passover Meal, likewise, was only an external sign of Faith. The Church's Holy Eucharist, by contrast, is the Spirit of Promise making present both the Lord Jesus' saving Sacrifice and His Risen Life. A sacred thing is not merely remembered, it is truly made present.

Justification is far more than God simply deciding to treat us sinners as though we were righteous. Justification, the work of the Holy Spirit of Promise within us, actually makes us righteous. The Holy Spirit of Promise changes us. Our justification is not only or even mainly outward. It is mainly inward. We are changed, made righteous, from the inside out. Faith makes this change possible; indeed, Faith makes this change certain, but only if we cooperate with the Holy Spirit in willing and doing the good.

What is the good essentially? What is righteousness essentially? Love. Faith opens the door to the Spirit of Promise, Who makes us loving, as God is loving. Indeed, God is Love, which makes Love a greater thing than Faith. Faith sees the possibility of Love, but Love is the original and ultimate reality of all things, the essence of divine Life. God, in His infinite Love, enables us to share in His Love by justifying us through His Spirit of Promise. That Spirit of Promise little by little changes us into beings of Love, capable of loving in the image and likeness of the God Who is Love.

I must finish with a call to Holy Communion. The Israelites in the desert ate Manna, but still died, since Manna was only an external sign of Faith. About the Holy Eucharist, the Lord Jesus says "Whoever eats this Bread shall live forever" (John 6:51). The Eucharistic Bread is not merely a sign of Faith. By the work of the Spirit of Promise, the Eucharistic Bread is the true Presence of the Love of God made Flesh, Our Lord Jesus Christ. As we receive Holy Communion in Faith, we are put in contact with the Reality to which Faith points. The Lord Jesus redeems our bodies with His Body, and washes our souls with His Blood. As we receive the Holy Eucharist with Faith, we are justified, which is to say changed, to become more like the Lord we receive.