

CHAPTER 4

FAITH IN GOD

ITS POWER AND FRUITS

- A) What is faith?**
- B) Mind and faith - Faith and unseen matters**
- C) Our Christian faith in God -
Does it embrace specific beliefs?**
- D) Does faith have degrees?**
- E) Relation between faith and spiritual life**
- F) Some fruits of faith**
- G) Promoters and deterrents of faith**

Faith is the entrance to a healthy relationship between man and God. The Apostle Paul says: **"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him"** (Hebrews 11:6). The same Apostle adds: **"for whatever is not from faith is sin"** (Romans 14:23). Since lack of faith is a sin, no relationship between man and God can be based on a lack of faith.

From here we find that faith is very valuable. The Apostle Peter expresses that as he writes his second Epistle **"to those who have obtained like precious faith with us"** (2 Peter 1:1). Indeed there is nothing more precious than faith, because by faith we come close to God and we are bound to Him: **"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God"** (Romans 5:1, 2).

And by faith, Jesus dwells in the heart of man. This is what the Apostle Paul says openly to the Ephesians: **"that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith"** (Ephesians 3:17), **and it is the means by which the righteous lives:** **"Now the just shall live by faith"** (Hebrews 10:38). **Besides, it is one of the main Christian virtues; faith, hope and love** (1 Corinthians 13:13).

No doubt that faith is considered the greatest free gift which God gave to man, and by it we gain salvation from the slavery of sin and from eternal death. The Lord Jesus says: **"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned"** (Mark 16:16). After the miracle which took place in the prison of the city of Philippi where Paul and Silas were kept, the prison keeper asked them what must he do to be saved - the answer of the two Apostles was: **"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household"** (Acts 16:30, 31).

The Apostle John concludes his Epistle by saying: **"but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name"** (John 20:31). St. Ambrose was right when he said: **"Faith is a continuous daylight, for which no night follows"**.

A) WHAT IS FAITH?

Faith is life by which man lives "Now the just shall live by faith" (Hebrews 10:38), else it is a theoretical faith, which may be summarized and limited to adopting certain dogmas which man repeats as in the "Creed". **There is no need for "faith in God" without a personal relationship with Him, which leads us to love and obey Him, and becomes a fellowship which begins here on earth and is continued in the eternal Kingdom. There is no use for "faith in a life after death" unless we prepare ourselves for it by repentance, love and striving. This is the life of faith, the practical faith which saves the soul, and whose fruits show in our lives, not the theoretical one** which does not save the soul but brings condemnation upon it.

Faith is not by pretence, belonging or by inheritance, such as claiming to have faith because of one's name or that one belongs to a believing pious family. **Again, faith is not a theoretical dogma, but it is life:** "You will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16-20). **It is tested by the life of obedience to God:** "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him", and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3, 4).

Faith in God does not require theological knowledge, but first and foremost requires trust in God and belief in His words and promises. In the eleventh chapter of his Epistle to the Hebrews, the Apostle Paul presents to us examples of men of faith. None of them was a philosopher, or a theologian. Among them was **Enoch**, about whom we all know that he "walked with God" (Genesis 5:22) and "that he pleased God" (Hebrews 11:5), and **Abraham** who "obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going" and offered up his son Isaac, "concluding that God was able to raise him up" (Hebrews 11:8, 17-19). **Sarah** was also on the list of the heroes of faith "because she judged Him faithful who had promised" (Hebrews 11:11).

The Apostle Paul defined faith as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). In this case faith is trust in God, in His words and in His revelations. The same Apostle after he defined faith said: "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God" (Hebrews 11:3), and because faith is an absolute trust in God, His words and His revelations: "for whatever is not from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23), because lack of faith means lack of trust in God, His words and His revelations.

B) MIND AND FAITH

Therefore, faith is not just a feeling, sensation or an emotion. Neither it is a vague call for mysterious matters, or forcing of the soul to surrender to the unseen or to what cannot be perceived by senses. Faith is not the cancellation of the mind, rather it is belief in the facts of faith with acceptance. **But for the mind to accept the facts of faith and submit to faith without resistance or search, it needs humility of thought on the side of man.**

The Christian saint and philosopher Augustine said:

"If you wish to reach up to the supremacy of God, first look for Him in His humility. Be humble if you wish, as humility is useful for you, for God humbled Himself for your sake and not for His sake. Take the humble Jesus and learn humility from Him. When you take His humility you will be lifted up with Him.

Believe in His commandments, and keep them so that He gives you the ability to understand. Do not lean on your knowledge and do not prefer it to the commandment of God, else you lose your ability and become weak. Christ dwells in your heart by faith. Remember the testimony of Christ: "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and has revealed them to babes" (Matthew 11:25). He hid them from the wise and prudent and has not revealed them to the ignorant nor the fool **but to the babes, that is, the humble.**

Do not seek what becomes haughty in your heart, but what is worthy for your heart to rise up to. If you learn to glorify the Crucified One, you will get glory from the King. **Many people knew what they wanted, but could not get it because they were not humble. Do not be proud, faith is a free grace from God, and not a reward for something you do, but a benevolence from God. Your faith is a gift from God and not a right you deserve.**

Listen to the words of the Lord Jesus: "No one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father" (John 6:65). Believe and you will come near, love and you will be called. Come to Christ and do not worry about the length of the road. Believe and come".

When the mind submits and completely surrenders to the facts which faith calls for, the Holy Spirit, through this wanted obedience which resulted from humility, unveils to the mind all what relates to these facts of faith: "The Holy Spirit, He will teach you all things" (John 14:26). In the light of the new spiritual knowledge, the Holy Spirit leads the mind to the truth. The Lord Jesus said to Martha before He raised Lazarus from the dead: "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" (John 11:40).

Then comes the role of the mind. After it accepts the facts of faith in humility and submission, and is enlightened by spiritual knowledge, it can search these facts. In this case, the

search by the mind increases the clarity of these facts of faith.

It is necessary here to point to **these facts of faith which the mind accepts. To start with, they are matters which God has proclaimed from the very beginning which no one else could reveal or proclaim. They are matters which are above our human nature to comprehend for they belong to the unseen and the supernatural, for no one can conceive of them by his mind and senses.**

Saint Paul says: "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? **Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.** Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him". But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. **For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God"** (1 Corinthians 2:11-13, 9, 10).

About the relationship between mind and faith, the Saint and Philosopher Augustine said:

"Believe and you become worthy to understand. Faith comes before understanding, so that understanding becomes part of the faith. It is better to believe with simplicity in what you preach, because the goal of the mind is to discuss details. By faith you unite (with God) and by mind you live. Before anything you have to unite by faith so that you live by mind. If you do not unite, you will resist, and if you resist, you are not a believer. And if you resist, how can you live? You make yourself an enemy to the ray of light inside you. **If someone says: "I want to understand, it is my duty to understand in order to believe". I answer: "Believe and you will understand, understanding results from believing, and understanding is part of faith"**.

God gave you two physical eyes and a mind. Awaken the mind of your heart, and lift up Him Who dwells in your inner eyes, in order to open its windows and meditate upon the creation of God. Believe in what you do not see for the sake of what you see. **Faith reaches to what the human mind does not understand, and where the mind fails, faith succeeds and grows"**.

We conclude that the mind has its worth and by it God has distinguished man from animal. But the mind has its limits and cannot think more highly than it ought to think (Romans 12:3). Matters which are beyond the comprehension of the mind have to be accepted by faith. The mind may lead to the beginning of the road, but faith will lead you all the way to God. Hence, faith does not contradict the mind, but it surpasses it to far reaching stages, which the mind alone cannot reach".

C) FAITH AND THE UNSEEN

In his definition of faith, the Apostle Paul says: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, **the evidence of things not seen**" (Hebrews 11:1). The word "evidence" indicates strong confidence and without doubt. **In this instance we say that there is a difference between men of faith and men of scientific research.** Men of faith believe the unseen and trust in it, but men of scientific research want to submit everything to what their minds accept. Here we remember the words of the Lord Jesus to Thomas when he was doubtful about the Lord's glorious Resurrection: "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). But what are those unseen matters which the Apostle Paul points out to in his explanation of faith?

Among the unseen are God and His attributes: "No one has seen God at any time" (John 1:18), and when David for example said: "I have set the Lord always before me" (Psalm 16:8), no doubt, the setting here was by the eye of faith. Among the unseen also are the promises of God. "These (men of faith) all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13).

Among the unseen are the warnings of God about matters that are going to happen, such as the flood at the time of Noah (Genesis, Chapters 6-9) and the burning destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24-28).

Also among the unseen are the blessings of God and His Graces within man, such as to become the temple of God and the dwelling of the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). **And among the unseen are the Heavenly Hosts,** according to what happened in the war of the King of Aram with Israel at the time of the Prophet Elisha. His servant Gehazi saw an army surrounding the city with horses and chariots. But when Elisha prayed to the Lord to open the eyes of Gehazi, the Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6).

Again among the unseen are the matters related to the world to come, the glory which awaits the believers and the woes which await the wicked. Also among the unseen are the work of the Holy Spirit in the Sacraments of the Church, ... etc.

D) OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH IN GOD

Does it embrace specific beliefs?

God in the faith of the Christians is not a mere unseen Supreme Power which manages the Universe and plans the lives of the people. The Christians believe in one God of three Hypostases, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They believe that the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, in the fullness of time was incarnated and became man. He took flesh from the pure Virgin Mary and became a full man after He made His body one with His Divinity, without mingling, confusion, nor alteration. Hence, God Who was unseen in the Old Testament, became seen in Christ in the New Testament: "And the Word became (took) flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

There is no contradiction between that and what God said to the Prophet Moses in the past when Moses asked to see His glory: **"You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live"** (Exodus 33:18, 20). In fact John the Evangelist who started his Gospel by talking about the Son of God Who was from the beginning and of His Incarnation assured us by saying: "No one has seen God at any time" (John 1:18).

Yet, the matter is very simple. What is meant by the impossibility of seeing God, is the impossibility for man to see the Divinity of God. Thus when the Son of God, the Word, the second Hypostasis, wanted to accomplish the work of redemption He took a body in which He hid His Divinity and with which He accepted sufferings on behalf of Man. **This is a basic belief in the Christian faith, which connects our salvation, forgiveness of our sins, being worthy of eternal life in Heaven, and the pouring of Divine Grace by the work of the Holy Spirit. It gives humanity the blessings of salvation through the Holy Sacraments of the Church.**

Christians attach great importance to the dogma of Incarnation, their belief in it and in its blessings. By the Incarnation our human nature was blessed and we became partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). In fact the Christian Church is built on the rock of faith that Christ is the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:18).

Christian faith is belief in the Incarnation, Redemption and the blessings which resulted from them: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). "He who believes in Him (Christ) is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already" (John 3:18). The Lord Jesus rebuked the Jews saying: "For if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24).

In the Christian faith, Jesus is the Saviour, hence he who believes in Him and in His redeeming work is saved. When they were in prison in the city of Philippi, Paul and Silas said to the prison keeper: **"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household"** (Acts 16:31). It was for the faith in Jesus Christ the Saviour, that the Gospels and the Epistles of the Apostles were written and evangelized with. St. John says at the end of his Gospel: **"But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name"** (John 20:31).

DOES CHRISTIAN FAITH EMBRACE SPECIFIC BELIEFS?

We ask: Is Christian faith a naive belief in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Salvation supported by a life of worship, pure piety and nothing else? Or are there specific beliefs inside the circle of Christian faith?

To say that there are no specific beliefs inside the circle of Christian faith implies a wrong understanding of genuine Christianity "for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3). From the beginning - since the time of the Apostles - the Church had, besides its general Christian faith, certain definite basic beliefs. She formulated them in a creed known as the "Creed of the Apostles" which had to be learned by any one who wished to be baptized. He had to announce it at the moment of his baptism, promising to keep it. When doctrines and heresies appeared at later times the Church in the Ecumenical Councils formulated the Creed for every Christian in the world, which we recite up till now and by which we declare our faith.

Once a non-Orthodox professor of theology said: "To imagine early Christianity as a way of life without theological beliefs - portrayed by the "Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5-7), and nothing else, is not fair and is not supported by historic references".

A common faith existed and was mostly referred to in the New Testament as "the traditions" (1 Corinthians 11:2), "that form of doctrine to which you were delivered" (Romans 6:17), "the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42), "the pattern of sound words" (2 Timothy 1:13), "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3)".

The Apostles of Christ defended these Christian beliefs within the one faith, and they fought against those who deviated from it "who will secretly bring in destructive heresies" (2 Peter 2:1). **The Apostle John even commanded the believers to totally boycott them so that they would not share in their evil deeds** (2 John 1:10, 11).

FAITH WORKING THROUGH LOVE:

There are two kinds of faith: the first is a mental theoretical faith which millions of people share as well as the demons themselves. The Apostle James says **"You believe that there**

is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe-- and tremble!" (James 2:19). This kind of faith is what the Apostle describes as dead by itself (James 2:17).

The second kind of faith is practical and it is precious and rare. About this kind of faith, the Lord Jesus said: "For assuredly, I say to you, **if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there", and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you"** (Matthew 17:20). The Apostle Paul wrote about it to the Galatians saying: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, **but faith working through love"** (Galatians 5:6). **The literal exact meaning of "faith working through love" is the faith which expresses itself by love, or the faith which works by love.** Because unless faith expresses itself and its presence in man, it becomes a worthless theoretical faith, or in other words a dead faith.

A true believer has his behaviour in complete accordance with his faith, and there is no contradiction between his conduct and his beliefs. He exceeds in the works of love because his faith is alive. A living faith is a working faith, while the faith which does not work is a dead faith which has no value: **"Faith without works is dead"** (James 2:20), and each time the Holy Bible mentions faith, it means faith "working through love".

The necessity of good works for the salvation of man is a subject of dogmatic contention, but we will not discuss it here. We simply say that good works is like the fruits of the living faith, and the tree is known from its fruits (Matthew 12:33). In His everlasting sermon on the mount, the Lord Jesus said: "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 7:19). The Apostle James asks: "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?" (James 2:4) and he continues saying: "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:24).

Our Lord Jesus says: "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, **and then He will reward each according to his works"** (Matthew 16:27), and also: "For the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice **and come forth-- those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation"** (John 5:28, 29).

St. Paul speaks about God who **"will render to each one according to his deeds"** (Romans 2:6), and says: **"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them"** (Ephesians 2:10). The Lord Jesus concludes the New Testament in the Revelation which He proclaimed to John and says: **"And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work"** (Revelation 22:12).

E) DOES FAITH HAVE DEGREES?

The Apostle Paul says: "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, **as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith**" (Romans 12:3). **Perhaps this verse explains that faith varies from one person to the other. The matter is not as some may portray when they refer to lack of faith as being weak or they say that this person is a believer and that person is a nonbeliever!**

In his talk about the qualities of the bishop, the Apostle Paul states a condition that the person chosen to be a bishop should not be "a novice" (1 Timothy 3:6).

The Lord Himself referred to those who are weak in their faith or who have little faith. As He was speaking about the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet our heavenly Father feeds them (Matthew 6:26) and the lilies of the field, how God covers them with beauty (Matthew 6:28, 29), He said: "will He not much more clothe you, **O you of little faith?**" (Matthew 6:30). He rebuked Peter as he doubted when he was walking on the water as commanded by the Lord and said: "**O you of little faith, why did you doubt?**" (Matthew 14:31), and He rebuked the Disciples in the ship when they were terrified from the waves and said: "**Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?**" (Matthew 8:26). **Here we notice that fear and doubt are features of little faith.**

As he was talking about those who stumble from eating what is sacrificed for idols, the Apostle Paul points out to a fourth kind which he calls "weak in the faith" (Romans 14:1).

There are people who have a restricted or limited faith. Such were Mary and Martha who believed that Jesus could only heal. That was the limit of their faith: "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21, 22).

There are others who have a slow faith because of lack of understanding knowledge. Among those were the Disciples of Emmaus, to whom Jesus said: "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!" (Luke 24:25).

There are others whose faith is in a state of growing. The Apostle Paul wrote to the people of Thessalonica, thanking God for them **because their faith "grows exceedingly"**, (2 Thessalonians 1:3), and he wrote to the Corinthians describing them as they abound in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence (2 Corinthians 8:7).

There are yet others who are described as **full of faith, such as Stephen (Acts 6:5, 8).**

Finally, there are those **whose faith is dead**, as the Apostle James describes them (James 2:17) and those who abandon faith completely: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1).

F) RELATION BETWEEN FAITH AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

The Christian faith is a working faith through love, it is closely related to man's spiritual life, or as St. Augustine calls it "Head of the righteous life". One of the fathers says: "I believe that nothing can make our spirit grow stronger and faster than faith. By faith, I do not mean the theoretical belief that God exists, but the living faith dwelling inside. This faith makes the soul able to believe and to win for her the joyous stature of saints, while she is living on earth".

In true faith, man is subservient to his faith, not the other way round. If faith is subservient to man it changes according to man's mood, physiological status and thoughts. But when man submits to faith, faith works gradually to purify him. Hence we and faith change and grow. Even by faith we go beyond ourselves. **The following are examples:**

1- Faith affects man's conscience and his will: Desires and pleasures enslave man and he who submits to them becomes in a way unable to yield to his mind and behaves in an irrational way. He has a mind which serves his desires. As desires enslave the mind, the mind labours and thinks for his desires. Then the mind justifies devious desires, or as it is said: "the mind is a faithful servant to the soul", and by the soul here we mean its desires and devious tendencies.

Yet faith makes the mind firm and sows in it the seeds of a new and holy plant, by which man resists fulfilling his desires and yielding to them. As a whole, faith lifts up the will.

St. Augustine says: "You will not lead a virtuous life until you start to believe, and when you care for your faith you receive the rest of God's gifts in abundance. Every good work done by man is not good unless it is related to the reverence of God. Unless faith precedes there is no goodness in life. **Listen to the Apostle Paul when he says: "But without faith it is impossible to please Him"** (Hebrews 11:6), **and unless your faith is candid you would not be righteous, as "the just shall live by faith"** (Hebrews 10:38)".

2- Faith is strongly connected to prayer: About the relation between faith and prayer
St. Augustine says: "If you do not have faith, there will be no room for prayer, how do you pray for whom you do not believe. Faith is the source of prayer. In this the Apostle says: "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?" (Romans 10:14). The conclusion is believe in order to pray, and pray to keep your faith by which you pray. Faith multiplies prayer and prayer in abundance strengthens Faith".

If the above is said about prayer in general, faith is closely related to accepted prayer. The Lord Jesus says: "And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matthew 21:22) and "Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them" (Mark 11:24). Thus the Apostle James says: "And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven" (James 5:15).

3- Faith produces patience in us: What man gets by patience he cannot get by any other means. The Apostle James says: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, **knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.** But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:2-4).

4- Faith offers us strength in times of trials and difficulties: The weaker our faith becomes, the stronger the trial is upon us. The firmer our faith is, the better we resist the temptation and overcome it. **Pure faith lives amidst the temptations and difficulties of this world. The world shakes but faith does not shake, it is firm,** as the Apostle Peter calls it: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, **steadfast in the faith"** (1 Peter 5:8, 9).

By faith we know that we are not alone in our wars and strives. Faith sustains the trust of man in his striving and strengthens his hope in God. Our Messiah is called "Immanuel" which means "God with us" and "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

5- Faith increases our trust in God's promises which fills the Books of the Holy Bible: All God's promises are for us, and we receive them by faith. Faith in Who? Faith in "Jesus,

the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). The expression "the author of faith" means the beginning of faith. Hence Christ is the basis of our faith, the beginning of our faith and the finisher of our faith. By trusting in Him we receive everything according to His true promises, if we keep His commandments and live in obedience to the faith in God and His Church : "the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15).

6- As a whole, faith is related to many aspects of man's spiritual life. For example, man is shy of doing wrong in front of an important personality. He also disdains from doing wrong in front of a person lower in rank than him, for self respect. That is why people commit sins secretly. Hence it is said about sinners "men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). Man is afraid of another person who sees him sin. **Faith makes us feel that we are always in the presence of God and that He sees us.** This was what kept Joseph the righteous from sinning with the wife of his master Potiphar in Egypt: "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). This is what keeps us also and bestows modesty to the heart.

If we believe in eternity and keep that in front of us, our consciences are awakened, and if we believe in the love of God, we are careful not to injure it: "And one will say to him, "What are these wounds between your arms?" Then he will answer, "Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends" (Zechariah 13:6). If we believe in virtue as our way of life, we walk in the road of piety and virtue. If we believe in the perishability and triviality of the world we abstain from doing wrong. Faith leads us to forsake worldly matters: "and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away" (1 Corinthians 7:31). And by faith we overcome the world with all what is in it: "And this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith" (1 John 5:4).

G) SOME FRUITS OF FAITH

Faith has many spiritual and blessed fruits, among which are the life of submission, peace, joy, contentment, thanksgiving, and overcoming life's difficulties.

1 - Life of submission: It is a fruit of faith. **If faith in God is trust in Him, then this faith**

or this trust leads me to submit my life to God Whom I trust. If trust is lacking, there could be no submission because it is obeying faith.

The believer submits his life to God without reservation, conditions or guarantees. He is sure of His love, wisdom and power. Many do not submit to God until their human means fail. This is not faith, but it is a compulsory coming to God. The Lord Jesus says: "for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). **What threatens man's spiritual life most is when he tries to behave independently of God, relying on his own thinking and plans away from the guidance of God. He considers that he is not in need to let God share with him what he does.**

God granted man a mind and a will, but not to use them independently. The Wise says: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). The first sin of man was when he tried to obtain knowledge independent of God.

The true believer does not only depend on God but submits everything to Him, because God made foolish the wisdom of this world (1 Corinthians 1:20). True knowledge is from God "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). **The life of submission means that man confesses his lack of knowledge.**

A life of submission does not know complaint or murmur, but accepts everything with contentment, joy and thanksgiving. He who lives a life of submission does not yield to the will of God with pressure, obligation or sadness, but from inside he shouts with acceptance: "Thy will be done", because how unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! (Romans 11:33).

The following are examples of men of God who lived the life of complete submission:

Noah when God commanded him to build an ark because He would bring floodwater on the whole earth and destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life. Everything that is on the earth shall die (Genesis 6:17). Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did (Genesis 6:22). In complete surrender Noah built the Ark for things not yet seen (Hebrews 11:7).

And when God called Abram (Abraham) to get out of his country, from his family and from his father's house, to a land that He will show him (Genesis 12:1), he did not object, but obeyed in complete surrender and he went out, not knowing where he was going (Hebrews 11:8). **And another time when God asked him to offer up his only begotten son Isaac as a sacrifice,** he obeyed in complete surrender, though God promised him that in Isaac his seed shall be called: "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called" (Hebrews 11:17, 18).

And when Abraham sent his oldest servant Eliezer of Damascus to find a wife for his

son, Isaac said to him: "The Lord God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my family, and who spoke to me and swore to me, saying, "To your descendants I give this land", He will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there" (Genesis 24:7).

When Moses crossed the Red Sea with God's people he behaved in complete obedience to the Creator of the supernatural. How would the water of the Sea split enabling them to walk on dry land at the bottom of the Sea (Exodus, Chapter 14). **Again the sojourn of God's people in the wilderness for 40 years was an example of a life of submission.** They did not question where they were going, what they would eat, what they would drink or what they would dress in this long journey!

The pure Virgin Mary is an example of a life of obedience and submission; in spite of her love for a life of virginity she accepted to be betrothed to a man named and to live with him. And when the angel brought to her the good tidings, she said to the angel: "Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

Submission and obedience show in the life of the Apostle of Christ and His Disciples. When Jesus saw Levi sitting at the tax office and said to him "Follow Me", he arose and followed Him (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). The Apostle Peter summarizes these events by saying to Jesus: "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" (Matthew 19:27; Luke 18:28).

From among the examples of the life of submission is Joseph the Righteous who in spite of the dreams he had and all the hardships he faced, he did not doubt, but submitted to God.

Another example is David who was shepherding his father's flock, when God sent Samuel to anoint him king, yet he did not hand him the kingdom. He continued shepherding the sheep without grumbling. He was then chosen a servant to Saul the rejected king from God: "But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him" (1 Samuel 16:14). David did not object or say that he was the chosen king by God, how can he serve this rejected king (Saul), but in complete submission he accepted the situation. He used to calm King Saul when the evil spirits troubled him. And Saul continued to chase David from wilderness to wilderness trying to kill him out of envy and jealousy. David never protested against God and did not say for example, "what evil have I done to deserve all this". He was waiting calmly for the salvation of the Lord. God had His wisdom in all. David was a young boy when he was chosen and anointed king. Waiting was to his benefit, to grow up, to mature and for the love of the people for him to increase day by day.

Without any exaggeration, a life of complete submission is a life of Christian perfection. In it God is working in man and with him. This is what the Apostle Paul mean when he says: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself

for me" (Galatians 2:20). In this case man does not fulfil his will but he becomes a tool of righteousness by which God accomplishes His will, the same as Jesus did when He said: "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38).

2 - Life of peace and joy:

Peace accompanies faith. The person who feels that he is alone becomes afraid, but he who believes that God is with him does not fear: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me" (Psalm 23:4).

Peace and joy are two splendid fruits of faith. St. Paul said to the Romans: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:1, 2). The Apostle Peter says: "Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:7, 8). After the prison keeper in Philippi believed and was baptized at the hands of Paul and Silas "had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household" (Acts 16:34).

In the prayer of thanksgiving we mention three of God's attributes: Beneficent, Almighty and Lover of mankind. Our belief in God and His attributes gives us peace and joy.

Our belief that He is Beneficent means that He does not do other than what is good. He never does anything evil to anyone, because evil does not agree with His Nature. And He wants to do good to you because He is the Lover of mankind, He is capable of doing that because He is the Almighty. And what is impossible for man is possible for Him. If you truly believe in that you live in peace, confident that God will provide all what is good and useful. Nothing will come to you which is not good and useful to you. Then peace will dwell in your heart, anxiety will disappear, and great joy will overcome you, because you trust in He Who holds you life.

If you feel anxiety and fear then realise that your faith is not steadfast. It is because of your weak faith you fear, the same as Peter when he walked on the water when the Lord commanded him. When Peter felt his feet sinking into the water, he cried out, saying: "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:30, 31).

If you do not fear God but you fear the devil and evil spirits and the harm they can do, be sure that they are only creatures subject to God, and they can do nothing beyond the limit of what God permits. That was clear from the story of Job and his temptation (Job, Chapters 1, 2).

The following are examples from the Holy Bible of peace and fearlessness as a result

of faith:

a - The encounter of David and Goliath. David said: "For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God? Let no man's heart fail because of him. Then David said to Goliath: "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD'S, and He will give you into our hands" (1 Samuel 17:26, 32, 45-47).

b - The encounter of Elijah and Ahab the King of Israel. After praying, Elijah closed the skies and there was no rain nor dew on the earth for three years and six months, then the Lord commanded Elijah to go and present himself to Ahab and tell him that He would send rain on the earth. Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, "Is that you, O troubler of Israel? And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and you have followed the Baals" (1 Kings 18:17, 18).

Let us meditate on how Elijah stood firm and was not afraid of the king because of the peace which overwhelmed his heart. This was the result of his faith in God, in whose presence he felt he was always standing.

c - The three young men whom Nebuchadnezzar King of Babel ordered to cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. The king challenged them by saying: "And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?". But the three young men answered and said to the king: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king" (Daniel 3:15, 17).

d - Daniel whom the king cast in the den of lions. When the king went the following morning to the den of lions to see what happened to Daniel, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel, and then Daniel said to the king: "O king, live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you" (Daniel 6:21, 22).

e - St. Peter the Apostle in prison. King Herod intended to kill Peter the next day. But that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison (Acts 12:6).

This situation demonstrates a soul filled with peace with no traces of fear. The story concluded with the angel of the Lord standing by him, and a light shining in the prison; the angel struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, "Arise quickly!" And his chains fell off his

hands. He then followed the angel and the prison gate was opened for them (Acts, Chapter 4).

3 - Contentment and thanksgiving:

A believing person lives in contentment. He is always thankful for his condition which God allowed him to be in. He believes that there is no better condition for him than the one he is in. For if there is a better one, God as the Beneficent one knows everything would have provided him with it. God said by the Apostle James: "To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17), would He not fulfil this Divine command?

A man of faith knows also that God in His wisdom, if He wanted to transfer him to a better condition, would chose a suitable time and condition that is best for him. Hence he lives in contentment with his condition, believing in the love and wisdom of God. He always thanks God upon every condition, for every condition, and in whatever condition. Such thanksgiving is not only expressed by words in prayer, but it is a constant feeling in the heart which overflows with joy and happiness all the time.

4. Overcoming difficulties:

There is nothing that stands in the face of a believer, no difficulties can hinder him from reaching what he wants, provided that what he wants is good. Faith makes miracles and overcomes evil powers: "Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith" (1 Peter 5:8, 9). St. John wrote in his first Epistle a strong phrase about faith: "And this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4, 5). The victory over the world here points to the victory in everything and over everything. These words apply to individuals as well as the Church, which by the faith of her people stood steadfastly in front of all the oppressive attempts to destroy her and to erase the Christian faith.

H) PROMOTERS AND DETERRENTS OF FAITH

Like any other virtue faith grows, gets stronger and advances, and sometimes gets weaker and dissolves. It has promoters and encouragements, and as well there are causes which weakens it, knowing that in each stage of a person's life his faith has a certain strength.

FIRST: PROMOTERS OF FAITH:

Among the promoters of faith are knowledge, simplicity, reading about God's wonders in His saints, boldness (courage), prayer, ...

a - Knowledge:

St. Isaac says that there are two kinds of knowledge, one precedes faith and the other results from it. Man, according to his knowledge, character, mental abilities believes in God and leans on Him. As man enters into the practical life of faith, and as he faces temptations, has experience, and as he is firm and sees the help of God in difficulties and distresses he gains from the experience of his faith a new kind of practical knowledge, different from the theoretical knowledge he started with. The latter knowledge is stronger and firmer and it encourages him and makes him grow stronger in faith. Hence as one's practical knowledge increases, his faith grows, and as his faith grows more he is thrown into more difficult experiences, his knowledge, increases more and his faith also.

b - Simplicity:

If knowledge is one of the promoters of faith, simplicity also encourages it. There is no contradiction here between knowledge and simplicity. By simplicity we mean simplicity of faith and keeping away from the doubts of the mind. We always ask: Why and how?! A man of God simply believes that God is capable of doing anything, and that he does not allow human wisdom (which is ignorance to God) to weaken his faith. God is above all wisdom and human knowledge, and if He can do things beyond the human mind, why would we place this limited mind as a barrier that blocks our faith.

c - Reading about the wonders of God through His saints:

Such kind of reading strengthens man, encourages him and inflames his heart with faith to rely on God and trust in Him. Man should seek the will of God in all matters of life. Two persons may go through the same situation. One analyzes it mentally trying to relate it to natural or personal causes, logical consequences or to mere chance; this person does not benefit from this matter spiritually. The second person considers the matter from the faith point of view and relates it

to the work of grace in him, and that is how his faith increases.

d - Boldness and courage:

There are believing matters which require courage and boldness of heart. We mean the boldness of heart which is built on trust in God and belief in His promises. A fearful person feels cowardly to get involved in such matters and his faith remains weak. He keeps standing on the shore of the Red Sea and is scared from dipping his feet into the water lest he should drown. Another person does not fear and plunges himself into difficult matters - in faith - and that results in acquiring new practical faith. That is why "For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance" (Matthew 13:12). Yet God does not leave the weak in faith in their weakness, but He sustains them gradually. If they can not depend on Him in risky or even difficult matters, He will get them to start with easy matters.

e - Prayer:

While we were discussing the relationship between faith and a spiritual life, we referred to prayer. **Now we add that when man's faith gets weaker, he either slackens and loses his crown or feels his weakness and becomes contrite at heart and asks for help from God.** As St. Isaac says: "If man becomes humble, he will be immediately surrounded by grace. His heart will feel Divine help and will be filled with faith". That is why man should always ask God to give him faith, and to strengthen this faith. After all, faith is a gift from God and not a human action: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44). In everything you do, you should begin with prayer, so that as God helps you to accomplish it, you rejoice in the help of God and your faith increases. But if you do any task without prayer and you succeed you may attribute your success to your personal effort, or to external reasons, and this makes you forget God's help which was with you without you being aware of it.

SECOND: DETERRENTS OF FAITH:

There are three main reasons that hinder faith and its growth; relying on natural knowledge alone, fear and doubt.

a - Relying on natural knowledge alone: Relying on natural knowledge alone delays faith. There are natural laws such as the impossibility of walking on water, moving mountains, rebuking winds and waves to calm them down, or raising a dead person by saying one word. Faith does not submit to these natural laws, and man's clinging to them hinders the work of faith which can do everything: "All things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23).

Besides denying miracles, the natural laws create fear in the soul, and fear does not give room to faith.

In the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead, as Martha realized that Jesus was about to raise her brother from the grave, she said to Him: "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days". That means it is useless, probably if You had come right after death there could have been some possibility to raise him from the dead. The answer of Jesus to Martha was: "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" (John 11:39, 40), and He did raise Lazarus from the dead.

And the Apostle Peter walked on the water and He calmed down the Sea and the wind by saying one word.

It is known that serpents and scorpions are very harmful and deadly. But faith annuls the effect of their harm: "Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you" (Luke 10:19). Science says that poison is deadly, but faith annuls its effect: "And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them" (Mark 16:17, 18). **How many miracles still happen now and every day by the power of faith. Science has its own circle and laws, and faith has another circle which does not submit to the logic nor to the laws of science.**

b - Fear: Fear stands against faith that relies upon the power of God and His promises. Abraham offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice "concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (Hebrews 11:19). **The three young men whom Nebuchadnezzar King of Babel, ordered cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace** rose above fear and said to the king: "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king" (Daniel 3:16, 17).

Likewise Daniel while he was in the den, was not harmed by the lions, which was exceptional beyond their nature: "and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God" (Daniel 6:23).

In his Revelation, St. John refers to a list of those who have no part in the eternal Kingdom of Christ and says: "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8). We notice that the cowardly were put on the top of this list, before the murderers, sexually immoral, and idolaters!

c - Doubt: Doubt is a strong barrier against faith. It is a sin pointed directly against God, because doubt is unbelieving in the promises of God. When Peter, who was walking on the water in response to the command of Jesus, saw the strong wind he became afraid and began to sink. The Lord Jesus said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:28-32). **We should notice here that fear resulted from doubt.**

The Apostle James says: "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord" (James 1:6, 7).

The Lord Jesus says: "For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, "Be removed and be cast into the sea", and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will come to pass, he will have whatever he says" (Mark 11:23).