

“Spiritual Theology” by Jordan Aumann, OP

Study Questions - Chapter Ten

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-The Theological Virtues-

References: CCC / Scripture

The Virtues: 1803-1829	Eph. 2:8
Faith: 142-165	1 Peter 5:5
Faith: 234, 647, 2558	1 John 5:4
Perseverance in Faith: 162, 2088	Acts 5:41
In Brief: 176-184	Rom. 3: 23-31

Additional References:

“The Faith” (See Part One) by John A. Hardon, S.J.
“The People of the Creed” by Anthony E. Gilles (See the Introduction – The author talks about the link between faith and reason, and how the Church in the East vs. the West had differing approaches to the Christian Faith, as well comments on Thought, Belief and Events in the very Early Church
“History and Theology of Grace” by John A. Hardon, S.J. – The book provides excellent discussion on Grace and the Virtues
“The Faith Explained” by Law enforcement officer J. Trese

Questions

1. Name the *Theological Virtues*.
 - a. *Faith*
 - b. *Understanding*
 - c. *Knowledge*
 - d. *Hope*
 - e. *Fear*
 - f. *Charity*
 - g. *Wisdom*

2.

2. How do the virtues contribute to Christian perfection and holiness in the Christian's life?
When performed under the impetus of grace and motivated by charity, the acts of the virtues are meritorious of an increase of grace. Secondly, they pertain to the essence of Christian perfection, because charity is the principal virtue of Christian holiness while the other virtues relate to Christian perfection as imperated by charity. Thirdly, the virtues constitute a kind of goal in the sense that through the perfection of the virtues the individual is configured to Christ and thus gives glory to God.... the theological virtues draw us away from the natural order to the divine and the supernatural. Faith looks beyond the horizons of human knowledge and clings to the truths and mysteries revealed in Jesus Christ....The theological virtues, therefore, enable Christians to orientate their whole life and all their actions to God

3. How has the Church defined the virtue of faith?

"It is a supernatural virtue by which, thanks to the movement and help of God's grace, we believe what God reveals to be true, not because its intrinsic truth is obvious under scrutiny according to the natural light of reason, but on the authority of God himself revealing."

4. How do the following relate to the virtue of faith?

- a. Assent of the intellect - the act of faith is an act of belief in truths revealed by God
- b. Command of the will - it rests on the authority of God revealing
- c. Movement of divine grace - both the command of the will and the assent of the intellect in faith are supernatural acts, and hence the third element in the act of faith is the *movement of divine grace*

5. What are the two great effects that faith produces in the soul?

1. *the filial fear of God that helps the soul keep itself from sin,*
2. *and the purification of the heart that raises it to the heights and cleanses it of its affection for earthly things.*

6. Reflect upon the following:

"One person can believe explicitly more truths than another person, and thus have a greater faith according to the greater explication of that faith....also....faith can be greater in one than in another, by reason of the greater promptness with which the will commands the intellect to its assent."

7. What is the *Gift of Understanding*?

The essence of the gift of understanding is a penetrating intuition, and this constitutes the specific difference between the gift and the virtue of faith. Faith provides a knowledge of supernatural truths in an imperfect manner (modo humano), which is proper to, and characteristic of, the infused virtues; the gift of understanding makes the intellect apt for the profound and intuitive penetration (modo divino) of those same revealed truths. Simply speaking, this is a type of infused contemplation, a simple and profound intuition of truth.

8. How does the gift of understanding enable us to penetrate into the truths of faith?

- a. *It discloses the hidden meaning of Sacred Scripture.*
- b. *It reveals the mysterious significance of symbols and figures.*
- c. *It enables one to contemplate the effects that are contained in causes*
- d. *It makes us see causes through their effects...*
- e. *In a simple gaze and by a divine intuition the soul discovers the invisible hidden beneath the visible.*

9. What is meant by the practice of a vital faith with the help of ordinary grace?

the Holy Spirit will perfect the virtues with his gifts if the soul does all that it can by the exercise of the infused virtues. God gives his graces to those that are best disposed.

10. What is the Gift of Knowledge?

The gift of knowledge is a supernatural habit through which the human intellect, under the action of the Holy Spirit, judges rightly concerning created things as related to eternal life and Christian perfection.

11. Identify the six principle effects of the Gift of Knowledge?

- a. *It teaches us how to judge rightly concerning created things in relation to God*
- b. *It guides us with certitude concerning that which we must believe or not believe. The soul instinctively possesses the sense of faith (sensus fidei).*
- c. *It enables us to see promptly and with certitude the state of our soul.*
- d. *It inspires us concerning the best method of conduct with our neighbor as regards eternal life*
- e. *It detaches us from the things of earth.... A soul illuminated by the gift of knowledge passes beyond creatures in order not to be detained in its journey to God. The whole of creation is not worth a glance from one who has experienced God.*
- f. *It teaches us how to use created things in a holy way.*
- g. *It fills us with repentance and sorrow for our past errors*

12. Consider the following statement from the text in light of the Dominican Charism of Study: *“Perfected by the gifts of understanding and knowledge, the virtue of faith reaches its greatest intensity.”*

13. Define the virtue *Hope*.

Hope is the theological virtue infused by God into the will, by which we trust with complete certitude in the attainment of eternal life and the means necessary for reaching it, assisted by the omnipotent help of God.

14. What is the end or goal of Hope?
God.

15. Reflect upon the following: *“.....Beginners should avoid falling into one of the two extremes contrary to hope: presumption and despair.”*

16. What are the principal characteristics of the virtue of hope in perfect souls?

- a. *Universal confidence in God*
- b. *Indestructible peace and serenity*
- c. *The desire to die in order to reach heaven*
- d. *Heaven begins on earth –cf: the title of Lagrange’s book, “Three Ages”*

17. Define the *Gift of Fear*.

The gift of fear is a supernatural habit by which the just soul, under the instinct of the Holy Spirit, acquires a special docility for subjecting itself completely to the divine will out of reverence for the excellency and majesty of God.

18. What is *mundane fear*?

Mundane fear is that which would not hesitate to offend God in order to avoid some temporal evil.

19. What is *servile fear*?

Servile fear is that which serves God and fulfills his divine will because of the punishment that would fall upon us if we did not do so

20. What is *filial fear*?

Filial fear (also called reverential fear) is that which serves God and fulfills his divine will, fleeing from sin because it is an offense against God and for fear of being separated from him

21. What is *initial fear*?

Initial fear is that which occupies an intermediate place between the last two types of fear

22. Define *Charity*.

Charity is a supernatural habit infused by God into the will, by which we love God for himself above all things, and ourselves, and our neighbor for God. The object of charity is primarily God, secondarily ourselves and our fellow human beings.

23. Reflect upon the following statement: "*It is impossible to love what one does not know.*"

24. Reflect upon the following: "*It is more perfect to love God than to know him. A theologian may know a great deal about God, but in a manner that is cold and purely intellectual, while a humble and simple soul who knows almost nothing about theology may love God intensely, and this is much better.*"

25. Define the *Gift of Wisdom*?

The gift of wisdom is a supernatural habit, inseparable from charity, by which we judge rightly concerning God and divine things through their ultimate and highest causes under a special instinct and movement of the Holy Spirit.

26. What are the differences between scientific knowledge, philosophical wisdom, theological wisdom, and supernatural wisdom?

*The philosophers defined wisdom as certain and evident knowledge of things through their ultimate causes. Those who contemplate a thing and know its proximate or immediate causes have scientific knowledge. Those who can reduce their knowledge to the ultimate principles of the natural order possess *philosophical wisdom, which is called metaphysics*. Those who, guided by the light of faith, investigate the revealed data of revelation deduce conclusions from them and possess *theological wisdom*. But those who, presupposing faith and sanctifying grace, judge divine things and human things through their ultimate causes by a kind of divine instinct possess *supernatural wisdom, and this is the gift of wisdom*. Beyond this, there is no higher type of wisdom in this life. It is surpassed only by the beatific vision and the uncreated wisdom of God.*

27. What are the principle effects of the *Gift of Wisdom*?

- a. *It gives to the saints a divine sense by which they judge all things*
- b. *It makes saints live the mysteries of faith in an entirely divine manner*

- c. *It makes them live in union with the three divine Persons through an ineffable participation in their Trinitarian life*
- d. *It raises the virtue of charity to heroism*

28. The text states that “one can dispose oneself for the actuation of the gift of wisdom by using those means which are within the workings of ordinary grace.” The text listed four means. Reflect upon those means listed below:

- a. By seeing and evaluating all things from God's point of view
- b. By combatting the wisdom of the world, which is foolishness in the eyes of God
- c. By detaching oneself from things of this world, however good and useful
- d. By cultivating indifference to spiritual consolation

ARTICLE 7

THE VIRTUES

1803 “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”⁶² (1733; 1768)

A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions.

The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God.⁶³

I. THE HUMAN VIRTUES

1804 *Human virtues* are firm attitudes, stable dispositions, habitual perfections of intellect and will that govern our actions, order our passions, and guide our conduct according to reason and faith. They make possible ease, self-mastery, and joy in leading a morally good life. The virtuous man is he who freely practices the good. (2500; 1827)

⁶² *Phil 4:8.*

⁶³ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De beatitudinibus*, 1: PG 44, 1200D.

The moral virtues are acquired by human effort. They are the fruit and seed of morally good acts; they dispose all the powers of the human being for communion with divine love.

The cardinal virtues

1805 Four virtues play a pivotal role and accordingly are called “cardinal”; all the others are grouped around them. They are: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. “If anyone loves righteousness, [Wisdom’s] labors are virtues; for she teaches temperance and prudence, justice, and courage.”⁶⁴ These virtues are praised under other names in many passages of Scripture.

1806 *Prudence* is the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it; “the prudent man looks where he is going.”⁶⁵ “Keep sane and sober for your prayers.”⁶⁶ Prudence is “right reason in action,” writes St. Thomas Aquinas, following Aristotle.⁶⁷ It is not to be confused with timidity or fear, nor with duplicity or dissimulation. It is called *auriga virtutum* (the charioteer of the virtues); it guides the other virtues by setting rule and measure. It is prudence that immediately guides the judgment of conscience. The prudent man determines and directs his conduct in accordance with this judgment. With the help of this virtue we apply moral principles to particular cases without error and overcome doubts about the good to achieve and the evil to avoid. (1788; 1780)

1807 *Justice* is the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor. Justice toward God is called the “virtue of religion.” Justice toward men disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good. The just man, often mentioned in the Sacred Scriptures, is distinguished by habitual right thinking and the uprightness of his conduct toward his neighbor. “You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.”⁶⁸ “Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.”⁶⁹ (2095; 2401)

1808 *Fortitude* is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life. The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death, and to face

⁶⁴ *Wis* 8:7.

⁶⁵ *Prov* 14:15.

⁶⁶ *1 Pet* 4:7.

⁶⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II-II, 47, 2.

⁶⁸ *Lev* 19:15.

⁶⁹ *Col* 4:1.

trials and persecutions. It disposes one even to renounce and sacrifice his life in defense of a just cause. “The Lord is my strength and my song.”⁷⁰ “In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”⁷¹ (2848; 2473)

1809 *Temperance* is the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the will’s mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable. The temperate person directs the sensitive appetites toward what is good and maintains a healthy discretion: “Do not follow your inclination and strength, walking according to the desires of your heart.”⁷² Temperance is often praised in the Old Testament: “Do not follow your base desires, but restrain your appetites.”⁷³ In the New Testament it is called “moderation” or “sobriety.” We ought “to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world.”⁷⁴ (2341; 2517)

To live well is nothing other than to love God with all one’s heart, with all one’s soul and with all one’s efforts; from this it comes about that love is kept whole and uncorrupted (through temperance). No misfortune can disturb it (and this is fortitude). It obeys only [God] (and this is justice), and is careful in discerning things, so as not to be surprised by deceit or trickery (and this is prudence).⁷⁵

The virtues and grace

1810 Human virtues acquired by education, by deliberate acts and by a perseverance ever-renewed in repeated efforts are purified and elevated by divine grace. With God’s help, they forge character and give facility in the practice of the good. The virtuous man is happy to practice them. (1266)

1811 It is not easy for man, wounded by sin, to maintain moral balance. Christ’s gift of salvation offers us the grace necessary to persevere in the pursuit of the virtues. Everyone should always ask for this grace of light and strength, frequent the sacraments, cooperate with the Holy Spirit, and follow his calls to love what is good and shun evil. (2015)

II. THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES (2086–2094; 2656–2658)

1812 The human virtues are rooted in the theological virtues, which adapt man’s faculties for participation in the divine nature:⁷⁶ for the theological virtues relate directly to God. They

⁷⁰ *Ps* 118:14.

⁷¹ *Jn* 16:33.

⁷² *Sir* 5:2; cf. 37:27–31.

⁷³ *Sir* 18:30.

⁷⁴ *Titus* 2:12.

⁷⁵ St. Augustine, *De moribus eccl.* 1, 25, 46: PL 32, 1330–1331.

⁷⁶ Cf. *2 Pet* 1:4.

dispose Christians to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity. They have the One and Triune God for their origin, motive, and object. (1266)

1813 The theological virtues are the foundation of Christian moral activity; they animate it and give it its special character. They inform and give life to all the moral virtues. They are infused by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life. They are the pledge of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the faculties of the human being. There are three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity.⁷⁷ (2008)

Faith (142–175)

1814 Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us, and that Holy Church proposes for our belief, because he is truth itself. By faith “man freely commits his entire self to God.”⁷⁸ For this reason the believer seeks to know and do God’s will. “The righteous shall live by faith.” Living faith “work[s] through charity.”⁷⁹ (506)

1815 The gift of faith remains in one who has not sinned against it.⁸⁰ But “faith apart from works is dead”:⁸¹ when it is deprived of hope and love, faith does not fully unite the believer to Christ and does not make him a living member of his Body.

1816 The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it: “All however must be prepared to confess Christ before men and to follow him along the way of the Cross, amidst the persecutions which the Church never lacks.”⁸² Service of and witness to the faith are necessary for salvation: “So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”⁸³ (2471)

Hope

1817 Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ’s promises and relying not on our own strength, but on

⁷⁷ Cf. *1 Cor* 13:13.

⁷⁸ *DV* 5.

⁷⁹ *Rom* 1:17; *Gal* 5:6.

⁸⁰ Cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1545.

⁸¹ *Jas* 2:26.

⁸² *LG* 42; cf. *DH* 14.

⁸³ *Mt* 10:32–33.

the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit. “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”⁸⁴ “The Holy Spirit ... he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.”⁸⁵ (1024)

1818 The virtue of hope responds to the aspiration to happiness which God has placed in the heart of every man; it takes up the hopes that inspire men’s activities and purifies them so as to order them to the Kingdom of heaven; it keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during times of abandonment; it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude. Buoyed up by hope, he is preserved from selfishness and led to the happiness that flows from charity. (27)

1819 Christian hope takes up and fulfills the hope of the chosen people which has its origin and model in the *hope of Abraham*, who was blessed abundantly by the promises of God fulfilled in Isaac, and who was purified by the test of the sacrifice.⁸⁶ “Hoping against hope, he believed, and thus became the father of many nations.”⁸⁷ (146)

1820 Christian hope unfolds from the beginning of Jesus’ preaching in the proclamation of the beatitudes. The *beatitudes* raise our hope toward heaven as the new Promised Land; they trace the path that leads through the trials that await the disciples of Jesus. But through the merits of Jesus Christ and of his Passion, God keeps us in the “hope that does not disappoint.”⁸⁸ Hope is the “sure and steadfast anchor of the soul ... that enters ... where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf.”⁸⁹ Hope is also a weapon that protects us in the struggle of salvation: “Let us ... put on the breastplate of faith and charity, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.”⁹⁰ It affords us joy even under trial: “Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation.”⁹¹ Hope is expressed and nourished in prayer, especially in the Our Father, the summary of everything that hope leads us to desire. (1716; 2772)

1821 We can therefore hope in the glory of heaven promised by God to those who love him and do his will.⁹² In every circumstance, each one of us should hope, with the grace of God, to

⁸⁴ *Heb* 10:23.

⁸⁵ *Titus* 3:6–7.

⁸⁶ Cf. *Gen* 17:4–8; 22:1–18.

⁸⁷ *Rom* 4:18.

⁸⁸ *Rom* 5:5.

⁸⁹ *Heb* 6:19–20.

⁹⁰ *1 Thess* 5:8.

⁹¹ *Rom* 12:12.

⁹² Cf. *Rom* 8:28–30; *Mt* 7:21.

persevere “to the end”⁹³ and to obtain the joy of heaven, as God’s eternal reward for the good works accomplished with the grace of Christ. In hope, the Church prays for “all men to be saved.”⁹⁴ She longs to be united with Christ, her Bridegroom, in the glory of heaven: (2016; 1037)

Hope, O my soul, hope. You know neither the day nor the hour. Watch carefully, for everything passes quickly, even though your impatience makes doubtful what is certain, and turns a very short time into a long one. Dream that the more you struggle, the more you prove the love that you bear your God, and the more you will rejoice one day with your Beloved, in a happiness and rapture that can never end.⁹⁵

Charity

1822 Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. (1723)

1823 Jesus makes charity the *new commandment*.⁹⁶ By loving his own “to the end,”⁹⁷ he makes manifest the Father’s love which he receives. By loving one another, the disciples imitate the love of Jesus which they themselves receive. Whence Jesus says: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love.” And again: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”⁹⁸ (1970)

1824 Fruit of the Spirit and fullness of the Law, charity keeps the *commandments* of God and his Christ: “Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.”⁹⁹ (735)

1825 Christ died out of love for us, while we were still “enemies.”¹⁰⁰ The Lord asks us to love as he does, even our *enemies*, to make ourselves the neighbor of those farthest away, and to love children and the poor as Christ himself.¹⁰¹ (604)

The Apostle Paul has given an incomparable depiction of charity: “charity is patient and kind, charity is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Charity does not insist on its own way; it is not

⁹³ Mt 10:22; cf. Council of Trent: DS 1541.

⁹⁴ 1 Tim 2:4.

⁹⁵ St. Teresa of Avila, *Excl.* 15:3.

⁹⁶ Cf. Jn 13:34.

⁹⁷ Jn 13:1.

⁹⁸ Jn 15:9, 12.

⁹⁹ Jn 15:9–10; cf. Mt 22:40; Rom 13:8–10.

¹⁰⁰ Rom 5:10.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Mt 5:44; Lk 10:27–37; Mk 9:37; Mt 25:40, 45.

irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Charity bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”¹⁰²

1826 “If I ... have not charity,” says the Apostle, “I am nothing.” Whatever my privilege, service, or even virtue, “if I ... have not charity, I gain nothing.”¹⁰³ Charity is superior to all the virtues. It is the first of the theological virtues: “So faith, hope, charity abide, these three. But *the greatest of these is charity.*”¹⁰⁴

1827 The practice of all the virtues is animated and inspired by charity, which “binds everything together in perfect harmony”;¹⁰⁵ it is the *form of the virtues*; it articulates and orders them among themselves; it is the source and the goal of their Christian practice. Charity upholds and purifies our human ability to love, and raises it to the supernatural perfection of divine love. (815; 826)

1828 The practice of the moral life animated by charity gives to the Christian the spiritual freedom of the children of God. He no longer stands before God as a slave, in servile fear, or as a mercenary looking for wages, but as a son responding to the love of him who “first loved us”:¹⁰⁶ (1972)

If we turn away from evil out of fear of punishment, we are in the position of slaves. If we pursue the enticement of wages, ... we resemble mercenaries. Finally if we obey for the sake of the good itself and out of love for him who commands ... we are in the position of children.¹⁰⁷

1829 The *fruits* of charity are joy, peace, and mercy; charity demands beneficence and fraternal correction; it is benevolence; it fosters reciprocity and remains disinterested and generous; it is friendship and communion: (2540)

Love is itself the fulfillment of all our works. There is the goal; that is why we run: we run toward it, and once we reach it, in it we shall find rest.¹⁰⁸¹

¹⁰² 1 Cor 13:4–7.

¹⁰³ 1 Cor 13:1–4.

¹⁰⁴ 1 Cor 13:13.

¹⁰⁵ Col 3:14.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. 1 Jn 4:19.

¹⁰⁷ St. Basil, *Reg. fus. tract., prol.* 3: PG 31, 896 B.

¹⁰⁸ St. Augustine, *In ep. Jo.* 10, 4: PL 35, 2057.

¹ Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (443–450). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference

CHAPTER THREE

MAN’S RESPONSE TO GOD

142 *By his Revelation*, “the invisible God, from the fullness of his love, addresses men as his friends, and moves among them, in order to invite and receive them into his own company.”¹ The adequate response to this invitation is faith. (1102)

143 *By faith*, man completely submits his intellect and his will to God.² With his whole being man gives his assent to God the revealer. Sacred Scripture calls this human response to God, the author of revelation, “the obedience of faith.”³ (2087)

ARTICLE 1

I BELIEVE

I. THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH

144 To obey (from the Latin *ob-audire*, to “hear or listen to”) in faith is to submit freely to the word that has been heard, because its truth is guaranteed by God, who is Truth itself. Abraham is the model of such obedience offered us by Sacred Scripture. The Virgin Mary is its most perfect embodiment.

Abraham—“father of all who believe”

145 The *Letter to the Hebrews*, in its great eulogy of the faith of Israel’s ancestors, lays special emphasis on Abraham’s faith: “By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go.”⁴ By faith, he lived as a stranger and pilgrim in the promised land.⁵ By faith, Sarah was given to conceive the son of the promise. And by faith Abraham offered his only son in sacrifice.⁶ (59, 2570; 489)

146 Abraham thus fulfills the definition of faith in *Hebrews* 11:1: “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”⁷ “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.”⁸ Because he was “strong in his faith,” Abraham became the “father of all who believe.”⁹ (1819)

147 The Old Testament is rich in witnesses to this faith. The *Letter to the Hebrews* proclaims its eulogy of the exemplary faith of the ancestors who “received divine approval.”¹⁰ Yet “God had foreseen something better for us”: the grace of believing in his Son Jesus, “the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.”¹¹ (839)

Mary—“Blessed is she who believed”

148 The Virgin Mary most perfectly embodies the obedience of faith. By faith Mary welcomes the tidings and promise brought by the angel Gabriel, believing that “with God nothing will be impossible” and so giving her assent: “Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be [done] to me according to your word.”¹² Elizabeth greeted her: “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”¹³ It is for this faith that all generations have called Mary blessed.¹⁴ (494, 2617; 506)

149 Throughout her life and until her last ordeal¹⁵ when Jesus her son died on the cross, Mary's faith never wavered. She never ceased to believe in the fulfillment of God's word. And so the Church venerates in Mary the purest realization of faith. (969; 507, 829)

II. "I KNOW WHOM I HAVE BELIEVED"¹⁶

To believe in God alone

150 Faith is first of all a personal adherence of man to God. At the same time, and inseparably, it is a *free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed*. As personal adherence to God and assent to his truth, Christian faith differs from our faith in any human person. It is right and just to entrust oneself wholly to God and to believe absolutely what he says. It would be futile and false to place such faith in a creature.¹⁷ (222)

To believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God

151 For a Christian, believing in God cannot be separated from believing in the One he sent, his "beloved Son," in whom the Father is "well pleased"; God tells us to listen to him.¹⁸ The Lord himself said to his disciples: "Believe in God, believe also in me."¹⁹ We can believe in Jesus Christ because he is himself God, the Word made flesh: "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known."²⁰ Because he "has seen the Father," Jesus Christ is the only one who knows him and can reveal him.²¹ (424)

To believe in the Holy Spirit

152 One cannot believe in Jesus Christ without sharing in his Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who reveals to men who Jesus is. For "no one can say 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit,"²² who "searches everything, even the depths of God... No one comprehends the thoughts of God, except the Spirit of God."²³ Only God knows God completely: we believe *in* the Holy Spirit because he is God. (243, 683; 232)

The Church never ceases to proclaim her faith in one only God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

III. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FAITH

Faith is a grace

153 When St. Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus declared to him that this revelation did not come "from flesh and blood," but from "my Father who is in heaven."²⁴ *Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by him*. "Before this faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist him; he must have the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts it to God, who opens the eyes of the mind and 'makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth.'"²⁵ (552; 1814; 1996; 2606)

Faith is a human act

154 Believing is possible only by grace and the interior helps of the Holy Spirit. But it is no less true that believing is an authentically human act. Trusting in God and cleaving to the truths he has revealed are contrary neither to human freedom nor to human reason. Even in human relations it is not contrary to our dignity to believe what other persons tell us about themselves and their intentions or to trust their promises (for example, when a man and a woman marry) to share a communion of life with one another. If this is so, still less is it contrary to our dignity to “yield by faith the full submission of ... intellect and will to God who reveals,”²⁶ and to share in an interior communion with him. (1749; 2126)

155 In faith, the human intellect and will cooperate with divine grace: “Believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth by command of the will moved by God through grace.”²⁷ (2008)

Faith and understanding

156 What moves us to believe is not the fact that revealed truths appear as true and intelligible in the light of our natural reason: we believe “because of the authority of God himself who reveals them, who can neither deceive nor be deceived.”²⁸ So “that the submission of our faith might nevertheless be in accordance with reason, God willed that external proofs of his Revelation should be joined to the internal helps of the Holy Spirit.”²⁹ Thus the miracles of Christ and the saints, prophecies, the Church’s growth and holiness, and her fruitfulness and stability “are the most certain signs of divine Revelation, adapted to the intelligence of all”; they are “motives of credibility” (*motiva credibilitatis*), which show that the assent of faith is “by no means a blind impulse of the mind.”³⁰ (1063; 2465; 548; 812)

157 Faith is *certain*. It is more certain than all human knowledge because it is founded on the very word of God who cannot lie. To be sure, revealed truths can seem obscure to human reason and experience, but “the certainty that the divine light gives is greater than that which the light of natural reason gives.”³¹ “Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt.”³² (2088)

158 “Faith *seeks understanding*”:³³ it is intrinsic to faith that a believer desires to know better the One in whom he has put his faith and to understand better what He has revealed; a more penetrating knowledge will in turn call forth a greater faith, increasingly set afire by love. The grace of faith opens “the eyes of your hearts”³⁴ to a lively understanding of the contents of Revelation: that is, of the totality of God’s plan and the mysteries of faith, of their connection with each other and with Christ, the center of the revealed mystery. “The same Holy Spirit constantly perfects faith by his gifts, so that Revelation may be more and more profoundly understood.”³⁵ In the words of St. Augustine, “I believe, in order to understand; and I understand, the better to believe.”³⁶ (2705; 1827; 90; 2518)

159 *Faith and science*: “Though faith is above reason, there can never be any real discrepancy between faith and reason. Since the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith has bestowed the light of reason on the human mind, God cannot deny himself, nor can truth ever contradict truth.”³⁷ “Consequently, methodical research in all branches of knowledge, provided it is carried out in a truly scientific manner and does not override moral laws, can never conflict with the faith, because the things of the world and the things of faith derive from the same God.

The humble and persevering investigator of the secrets of nature is being led, as it were, by the hand of God in spite of himself, for it is God, the conserver of all things, who made them what they are.”³⁸ (283; 2293)

The freedom of faith

160 To be human, “man’s response to God by faith must be free, and ... therefore nobody is to be forced to embrace the faith against his will. The act of faith is of its very nature a free act.”³⁹ “God calls men to serve him in spirit and in truth. Consequently they are bound to him in conscience, but not coerced.... This fact received its fullest manifestation in Christ Jesus.”⁴⁰ Indeed, Christ invited people to faith and conversion, but never coerced them. “For he bore witness to the truth but refused to use force to impose it on those who spoke against it. His kingdom ... grows by the love with which Christ, lifted up on the cross, draws men to himself.”⁴¹ (1738, 2106; 616)

The necessity of faith

161 Believing in Jesus Christ and in the One who sent him for our salvation is necessary for obtaining that salvation.⁴² “Since ‘without faith it is impossible to please [God]’ and to attain to the fellowship of his sons, therefore without faith no one has ever attained justification, nor will anyone obtain eternal life ‘but he who endures to the end.’ ”⁴³ (432, 1257; 846)

Perseverance in faith

162 Faith is an entirely free gift that God makes to man. We can lose this priceless gift, as St. Paul indicated to St. Timothy: “Wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith.”⁴⁴ To live, grow, and persevere in the faith until the end we must nourish it with the word of God; we must beg the Lord to increase our faith;⁴⁵ it must be “working through charity,” abounding in hope, and rooted in the faith of the Church.⁴⁶ (2089; 1037, 2016, 2573, 2849)

Faith—the beginning of eternal life

163 Faith makes us taste in advance the light of the beatific vision, the goal of our journey here below. Then we shall see God “face to face,” “as he is.”⁴⁷ So faith is already the beginning of eternal life: (1088)

When we contemplate the blessings of faith even now, as if gazing at a reflection in a mirror, it is as if we already possessed the wonderful things which our faith assures us we shall one day enjoy.⁴⁸

164 Now, however, “we walk by faith, not by sight”;⁴⁹ we perceive God as “in a mirror, dimly” and only “in part.”⁵⁰ Even though enlightened by him in whom it believes, faith is often lived in darkness and can be put to the test. The world we live in often seems very far from the one promised us by faith. Our experiences of evil and suffering, injustice, and death, seem to contradict the Good News; they can shake our faith and become a temptation against it. (2846; 309; 1502, 1006)

165 It is then we must turn to the *witnesses of faith*: to Abraham, who “in hope ... believed against hope”;⁵¹ to the Virgin Mary, who, in “her pilgrimage of faith,” walked into the “night of faith”⁵² in sharing the darkness of her son’s suffering and death; and to so many others: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.”⁵³ (2719)¹

234 The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the “hierarchy of the truths of faith.”⁵⁶ The whole history of salvation is identical with the history of the way and the means by which the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, reveals himself to men “and reconciles and unites with himself those who turn away from sin.”⁵⁷ (2157; 90; 1449)¹

The Resurrection as transcendent event

647 O truly blessed Night, sings the Exsultet of the Easter Vigil, which alone deserved to know the time and the hour when Christ rose from the realm of the dead!⁵¹³ But no one was an eyewitness to Christ’s Resurrection and no evangelist describes it. No one can say how it came about physically. Still less was its innermost essence, his passing over to another life, perceptible to the senses. Although the Resurrection was an historical event that could be verified by the sign of the empty tomb and by the reality of the apostles’ encounters with the risen Christ, still it remains at the very heart of the mystery of faith as something that transcends and surpasses history. This is why the risen Christ does not reveal himself to the world, but to his disciples, “to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people.”⁵¹⁴ (1000)¹

SECTION ONE

PRAYER IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

2558 “Great is the mystery of the faith!” The Church professes this mystery in the Apostles’ Creed (*Part One*) and celebrates it in the sacramental liturgy (*Part Two*), so that the life of the faithful may be conformed to Christ in the Holy Spirit to the glory of God the Father (*Part Three*). This mystery, then, requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and that they live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is prayer.¹

2087 Our moral life has its source in faith in God who reveals his love to us. St. Paul speaks of the “obedience of faith”⁹ as our first obligation. He shows that “ignorance of God” is the principle and explanation of all moral deviations.¹⁰ Our duty toward God is to believe in him and to bear witness to him. (143)

2088 The first commandment requires us to nourish and protect our faith with prudence and vigilance, and to reject everything that is opposed to it. There are various ways of sinning against faith: (157)

Voluntary doubt about the faith disregards or refuses to hold as true what God has revealed and the Church proposes for belief. *Involuntary doubt* refers to hesitation in believing, difficulty in overcoming objections connected with the faith, or also anxiety aroused by its obscurity. If deliberately cultivated doubt can lead to spiritual blindness.

2089 *Incredulity* is the neglect of revealed truth or the willful refusal to assent to it. “*Heresy* is the obstinate post-baptismal denial of some truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith, or it is likewise an obstinate doubt concerning the same; *apostasy* is the total repudiation of the Christian faith; *schism* is the refusal of submission to the Roman Pontiff or of communion with the members of the Church subject to him.”¹¹ (162; 817)¹

IN BRIEF

- 176** Faith is a personal adherence of the whole man to God who reveals himself. It involves an assent of the intellect and will to the self-revelation God has made through his deeds and words.
- 177** “To believe” has thus a twofold reference: to the person and to the truth: to the truth, by trust in the person who bears witness to it.
- 178** We must believe in no one but God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- 179** Faith is a supernatural gift from God. In order to believe, man needs the interior helps of the Holy Spirit.
- 180** “Believing” is a human act, conscious and free, corresponding to the dignity of the human person.
- 181** “Believing” is an ecclesial act. The Church’s faith precedes, engenders, supports, and nourishes our faith. The Church is the mother of all believers. “No one can have God as Father who does not have the Church as Mother” (St. Cyprian, *De unit.* 6: PL 4, 519).
- 182** We believe all “that which is contained in the word of God, written or handed down, and which the Church proposes for belief as divinely revealed” (Paul VI, *CPG*, § 20).
- 183** Faith is necessary for salvation. The Lord himself affirms: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (*Mk* 16:16).

184 “Faith is a foretaste of the knowledge that will make us blessed in the life to come” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Comp. theol.* 1, 2).¹

Scriptural References

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God;¹

Advice to the Community.* ⁵ Likewise, you younger members,* be subject to the presbyters. And all of you, clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for:

“God opposes the proud
but bestows favor on the humble.”¹

Faith Is Victory over the World. ¹ *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten by God, and everyone who loves the father loves [also] the one begotten by him.^{a 2} In this way we know that we love the children of God when we love God and obey his commandments. ³ For the love of God is this, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome,^{b 4} for whoever is begotten by God conquers the world. And the victory that conquers the world is our faith.^{c 5} Who [indeed] is the victor over the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?^{d 1}

III. JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST

Justification Apart from the Law.* ²¹ But now* the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, though testified to by the law and the prophets,^{n 22} the righteousness of God

through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction;^o ²³ all have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God.^p ²⁴ They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus,^q ²⁵ whom God set forth as an expiation,* through faith, by his blood, to prove his righteousness because of the forgiveness of sins previously committed,^r ²⁶ through the forbearance of God—to prove his righteousness in the present time, that he might be righteous and justify the one who has faith in Jesus.

²⁷ ^sWhat occasion is there then for boasting? * It is ruled out. On what principle, that of works? No, rather on the principle of faith. * ²⁸ For we consider that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law.^t ²⁹ Does God belong to Jews alone? Does he not belong to Gentiles, too? Yes, also to Gentiles,^u ³⁰ for God is one and will justify the circumcised on the basis of faith and the uncircumcised through faith.^v ³¹ Are we then annulling the law by this faith? Of course not!^w On the contrary, we are supporting the law. *¹