

## Do we have faith?

How strong is my faith?

I can't stop thinking and reflecting on what is happening in the world right now, and I am certainly confused as most of us are, and I keep thinking: why is this pandemic happening, is God trying to tell us something?

We just entered into Holy Week, but we know that this Holy Week and also Easter Sunday will not be the same as usual. Something has been taken away from us, namely, the things and events we know very well, the things we get used to so much, and the things and activities that we love doing. All have been taken away. But do we still have faith? Perhaps God took these away from us, or better -- not so much took them away but limited our access to our various religious practices for a reason. I think we should think about this possibility and try to understand the differences between our faith and our religion.

Our faith is so much more than our religion and our religious practices. They are intimately connected, and our faith begins and grows within our religion. But it is our faith that should be in the center of our lives, it should be the core of everything we do. Our faith is our intimate and personal connection to God and Christ. Our religious practices are there to help make our faith stronger. Because of this pandemic, our visible religion, especially the practices of religion (sacraments, devotions, community worship, etc.) were taken away from us for what looks like a good amount of time. We lack the external expressions of faith. But maybe this is one way God wants to call us to greater "faith". I feel this might be correct. I think that God wants us to think deeper about our faith (our personal relationship with the Lord) and to ask: how strong is it? Because our faith in God and our relationship with God and our love for God and our prayer life and our own salvation does not depend only on religious practices.

Don't misread me: I am not saying that we don't need them, and as I mentioned before, they should help us to deepen our relationships with God and to deepen our faith, but they are not in the center. The Eucharist is essential, sacraments are very important, beautiful liturgies and devotions are very helpful to put us in a nice prayerful mood or to encounter Christ the way He asked us to. But all these things are there to make our faith stronger. We feed on the Body and Blood of Christ to make our faith stronger, to make us more like Christ. By this I mean that we should become more like Him, by loving others, helping others, being the light to the world. The word "light" is important and Jesus uses this word and others words like leaven or salt to point out that the Church and our participation in the life of the Church is to make something grow, be strong, and make a difference in the world. Namely, our "faith". Faith is the center, and our religious practices keep leading us into this center.

And so, my question now is: do they really do that? Do these various religious practices that are taken away from us for now, help us to believe more, to deepen our faith and to make us better people, better Christians?

Let us think about that and go deeper, and ask ourselves: How many times have I gone to Church, but not because I wanted to make my faith stronger, but because this is my tradition, this is the obligation that I need to fulfill. I went because I like the music, I went because I love the people from my prayer group, I went because the weather was nice. I got married in the Catholic Church not because I wanted truly to invite God into my family, but because the Church is so nice and my family is religious and I felt the pressure. I baptized my child, not because I want him to be a holy child of God, but because my mom told me that this needs to be done. Why did I participate in the liturgies of Holy Week, why Palm Sunday, why the blessing of the food?

So, is my faith and love of God telling me that religious practices will help make my faith stronger, or am I just practicing my religion without any deep faith in God?

My dear friends, practices are necessary, and routines are great, and habits are reliable. But a lot of these things are now taken away from us. This is sad and disappointing, but for me it does not so much make me angry that I can't celebrate our beautiful liturgies with all of you, but it instead makes me think how strong and deep my faith is, even without all of this.

So, maybe God limited our access to our Churches and liturgies to make us think and realize that our faith is so much more important than just the Church building, than the structures of the Church, the religious practices, the traditions, habits that we have, the priests, bishops and Canon Law. These are important and we will rejoice when they are all put back in our lives.

I hope a permanent loss of them will never happen, but this can be a reminder from our God that even if we lose all of it, we still have faith. We can still pray, we can still believe, we can still love, and this is what we are called to. Our faith is the soul of our religion.

Lord, please increase my faith.

God bless you,  
Fr. Kris