

# SA Catholics for an Evolving Church



## An Easter Spirituality: Lent 2024

### Week 4. 1 April 2025

#### Focus for this week: Sense of Faith

1. Origins of faith
2. Personal Sense of Faith
3. Soul and self
4. Conscience
5. Prayer

#### 1. Origins of Faith

**Seven areas common to major religions** -Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism  
Zoroastrian Mazdeism,

1. There is a transcendent reality.
2. We have a natural awareness of this reality in our hearts.
3. This reality is supreme truth, beauty and goodness.
4. It is love, mercy and compassion.
5. The way to it (God) is - repentance, self-discipline, prayer.
6. Love of your neighbour, even of your enemies is central to living this reality.
7. Love of this reality (God) is central; bliss/salvation is thought of as knowledge of, union with or dissolution into this reality (God).

Earlier spiritualities also shared these features, though in less developed ways.

#### 2. Personal Sense of Faith

It is revealing to define faith as a fundamental trust in God, rather than a whole list of beliefs that together comprise 'the faith'. (Tomas Halík)

Richard Rohr talks about two halves of life; first, build the container (framework) for spirituality, second, fill the container with a mature spirituality from the experience and learnings of life. We could also refer to spirituality from the outside in and from the inside out.

The Spirit is the presence of God actively sustaining creation. (Denis Edwards)

Faith grows with the people who hold it. It is the same with our knowledge of truth.

The history of the first settlements in Australia, the Amazon region today and penal times in Ireland show that Catholicism can survive extreme circumstances on the sense of faith of the faithful.

### 3. Soul and self

Talking of soul often feels like talking about something I have. 'I have a soul,' or 'My soul is stressed.' We used to refer to sin as a 'stain on my soul'. Traditional spirituality sought to avoid subjectivism and subjectivity and so shied away from referring to self or personal feelings.

These days, when talking about myself, I am more inclined to say, 'I am', 'I am stressed' or 'I feel bad about what I did'. As we have felt more free to express our feelings and personal convictions, we tend to say more about our own experience and feelings. We put 'self' into the picture.

Traditional Catholicism refers to the sacraments as conferring grace. 'Baptism confers the grace of the Holy Spirit'. However, in a personalist perspective where relationship is central, it makes more sense to speak of the Spirit by which we live and a relationship of love with God.

### 4. Conscience

In religious contexts, the development of personal agency, of an adult relationship, is often described in terms of conscience. In the late 1800s, Cardinal John Henry Newman described conscience as 'the voice of God in us' and 'the advocate of truth in the innermost part of the human person'. Pope Benedict agreed. When acting with integrity and sincerity, conscience is the litmus test for our decisions and choices.

Pope Francis' *Motu Proprio, On Promoting Theology*, (November 2023) is most important in this context. He formally recognises what many Catholics long ago sensed and accepted. Tradition and scripture are best appreciated and understood in the real-life context of every day. The experience of human living is the ground on which we build a coherent integrated spirituality. Jesus could teach us a thing or two in this regard.

The inner drive to truth in our knowing and believing compels us to pay attention, be intelligent and reasonable. The desire for integrity, value and a worthwhile life rewards success with a good conscience.

### 5. Prayer

Most of us grew up with a sense of God as a parent figure in a transcendent heaven who constantly interacted with humans – for better or worse. It felt natural to pray to God for blessing and intervention for good in our lives, communities and even in our wars. The discoveries of science and our growing understanding of the complexity of life and the universe itself now often leave us with a quite different sense of the mystery that we call God. We know that God does not intervene to fix things directly. This raises the question, 'What is the point in praying to God for a better world?'

The answer to that, I think, lies in how we think of God as being present in our world. God is present as the Spirit that is in our hearts (Rom 5:5) or as Vatican II put it, 'sharers in the divine nature' (Dei Verbum 2). We are incarnations of God. Prayer is an expression of and communication with God in us. The Hindu greeting, 'Namaste', reflects this reality. The prayers of the people of Gaza are an appeal to the Spirit of God in us.