

Faith in a Performance Based Society

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The Gift of Faith

Faith is about *believing* and *seeing* in a new way. It cannot be earned; it is God's gift to us. And because it is God's gift, it is ours to accept or reject in *freedom, trust* and *love*. God's gift of faith says, "You are my unique and precious daughter, my son, and I am here for you, no matter what. There is nothing you can ever do to stop me from loving you. I AM – for you."

The gift of faith is free, freeing and unconditional. It affirms our supreme value as God's children. Faith is a kind of *default lens* through which Christians see themselves and the world. It provides right perspective; it permeates our lives, and through our activities and attitudes, orients our cultures toward goodness, kindness and truth. In this sense, faith is culture's true guiding principle. Without faith to guide it, culture ceases to be all it is called to be: that is, a reflection of our noble identity as image and likeness of God.

Secularism – Faith's Biggest Threat Today

The biggest threat to faith in North America today is *secularism*. Secularism is an ideology that seeks to build a world without reference to God. In its most extreme form, it tends to promote the pursuit of money, status, possessions, pleasure and power for self-fulfillment. Secularism's values saturate our media; they marginalize, ridicule or squash the voice of faith and its role in a meaningful life. Secularism leads to idolatry, enslavement to the *ego* or *state*, and destroys culture.

Secularism – Human Value in Performance

Secularism in North America tends to gauge our value by how well we perform pursuing its ideals. It tends to measure personal *success* according to criteria such as:

- Efficiency
- Productivity
- Income generating potential
- High profile associations
- Outward appearance
- Money spent on house, car, toys
- Loyalty to secular groupspeak and groupthink (ideologies)

Secularism – Selling us Short

Secularism sells us short on who we are. This is why in a secularized society, we need to be reminded that we are more than what we do, and that before all else, we are God's unique and beautiful children - masterpieces of God's creation. This is why God only pronounces creation *very good* after having made man and woman in the divine image and likeness (See Gen 1: 31). There is no greater success in all of creation than the human person, and each of us was purposely placed

on this earth as a unique reflection of God's glory. Secularism's Godless value system will encourage us to chase after self-fulfillment through performance alone, while ignoring the heart's thirst for the infinite – something that only the *Infinite* can fill.

Faith That Guides Performance – the Remedy to Secularism

The remedy for secularism lies in restoring faith as the light which guides our performance. Faith reminds us that we are precious, irreplaceable and of supreme value in God's eyes. And when it guides our lives, we can embrace performance measurement as an act of stewardship, by which we account for the gifts entrusted to us, such as personal talents, company assets, or government funds to educate ratepayers' children. Performance measurement encourages us to become efficient, productive and responsible. But if we stop there and neglect our faith life, we run the risk of falling into the *performance trap*: a lifestyle based on a hollow sense of self-worth built on personal success without reference to God.

What Happens When...

While working and living in a secular society, we need the security of knowing God's unconditional love, especially when our performance is not what we want it to be. For example, when ...

- I've done all I can, and everything's gone wrong due to circumstances beyond my control.
- I can't pray as much as I think I should on a given day.
- My mind is in a fog because I was up late looking after a sick child; I can't seem to get my thoughts together when speaking with co-workers, or answering students' questions.
- I can't in good conscience support a popular colleague's position.
- The humble car I drive is the only one I can afford.

A performance-based values system might encourage us to believe...

- *I'm a failure – if people only really knew...*
- *I haven't prayed enough to earn God's help; I am alone and it's my fault*
- *I'm so useless; why can't I do it all (like successful people do)?*
- *There must be something the matter with me. Am I deluded?*
- *I'm pathetic – I can't even put up a façade of success.*

Seeing through the eyes of faith might enable us to say...

- *I've done all I could. Give me the wisdom and courage to deal with this O God; it's beyond my control.*
- *Lord, I offer you my day, the people in my thoughts, my life and all who need your help. I trust in your love and mercy.*
- *Help me get through this day, Lord. You know my heart's in the right place.*
- *Help me to stay true to You and to treat others with kindness.*
- *Take care of me, God!*

Christ Has Set Us Free

God did not create us to be slaves to what will never satisfy our hearts. As St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Galatians, “For freedom, Christ has set us free.” (Gal 5, 1) Christians find this freedom in faith – in relationship with Jesus and his Church through Baptism, guided by the Gospel and living body of teaching that flows unbroken from the Apostles through their successors, our bishops. Our relationship with Jesus in faith upholds our value as God’s sons and daughters and guides our performance in all areas of life with the noblest of values.

Faith’s Transformative Power

Nurturing a life of faith enables us to perform the requirements of our employment as Catholic educators. Top notch performance alone might make us efficient, but not necessarily effective in our faith-based mission. In the same way, stellar student test scores alone will not make us good Catholic educators. Without faith’s light, our performance is without a soul, and our values-laden curriculum is delivered to students empty. Allowing our faith to guide our performance changes our work into *ministry*, upholds its value as *vocation*, and makes us *transformers of culture*.

Endless Possibilities in Christ

Good performance is an important part of our call to stewardship and service. And though we may not accomplish all the good we strive to do, God will realize through us more than we could have imagined. Rooted and guided in faith, our performance will become food for many. Like the five loaves and two fishes that fed thousands, its possibilities in Christ are endless. (See Mark 6: 30-44)

