

## Why This Book?

This book offers answers and a hands-on experience of the faith for people today because it is based on the sayings of Jesus in Scripture. In spite of the renewed emphasis on scripture, there is unfortunately a falling away today of Christians from the practice of the faith. Young people are abandoning mainline churches and they are left to wander about like ships without a rudder in today's cruel world. I've witnessed this in parishes all over the country where I have been an Outreach Speaker for Cross International. Knowledge of the faith for many young people today is minimal and in some cases almost nonexistent. It is not that people don't care; it is just that they are not motivated or excited about faith in their lives. As an educator I know how important motivation is. I also know how important it was to Jesus who says: "I have come to set the earth on fire and how I wish it were ignited" (Luke 12:49). Faith is like a fire within, and it has to be lived passionately with conviction. John Henry Cardinal Newman in the *Grammar of Ascent* described Faith as an "illative sense," a sort of sixth sense, an intuition or gift we are privileged to possess.

Faith should not be identified strictly with beliefs because faith is a special spiritual quality or gift bestowed upon the person. Such was the case with the Centurion in the gospel who, although he was a pagan, was rewarded for his faith (Luke 1–10). The same can be said of the Canaanite woman who Jesus healed (Matthew 15:21–28) and the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1–26) in whose village He spent several days.

We must never forget that faith is a gift. We do not merit it for it is given freely to people of goodwill by the Holy Spirit which, as Scripture says: "goes where it wills" (John 3:8).

The gift of faith cannot be imposed on us (by any human authority) but we can dispose ourselves to accept it when we open our hearts in love to the living Word of God in Scripture.

Although well-meaning, Christians sometimes make the mistake of confusing the gift of faith with beliefs or doctrines and, in their zeal to save others, they try to force their beliefs on them. This can have disastrous consequences, and I have encountered many instances where this has badly affected people.

I was walking in the parking lot of the church where I served as pastor in Okeechobee, Florida, while another priest was celebrating Mass. It was a typical sun-drenched morning in Florida, so I had to keep my exercise brief. A man was making his way towards me from the opposite direction, and we stopped to talk.

He told me he was killing time and was waiting for his wife who was singing in the choir. I remarked that I had observed him on other occasions pacing the parking lot during Mass time, and I was curious to know why he didn't attend Church himself.

"I got turned off from religion in my youth, and have never set foot inside a church ever since," he said, shaking his head dismissively.

"What happened, if you don't mind me asking?" I continued.

"My father was a minister, and he used to force me to accept his beliefs by dunking my head into a pail of water whenever I couldn't recite exactly what he told me. That's why I gave up on religion and don't go to church," he concluded.

As I was walking away, I realized that this unfortunate man had been abused by his preacher father who, in his zeal, tried to impose his beliefs onto his son. By forcing his beliefs on his son, the father effectively prevented him from enjoying the gift of faith, which God alone can give. Faith is a gift, and we should never play God by thinking we are the purveyors of this gift. The best we can do is be examples of this gift to others.

In this particular book, I will be dealing with the Christian Faith specifically. Newman also makes an important distinction between a notional faith and a real faith. A notional faith has to do with the acceptance of doctrinal propositions such as we find in the Christian Creed and in the church's teachings. There's nothing wrong with that in itself but it is not enough. A real faith is based on a personal response to the living word of the Gospel; it is a heartfelt faith because it is rooted in an encounter with Christ. In other words, it is personal knowledge or the wisdom that comes from personal experience.

There is always a need for a fresh approach to old truths if Christians want to remain relevant in today's world. The truths of Faith are ancient, but they are forever new (The Confessions of St. Augustine: Book X). This modest book on Faith, I feel, serves an urgent pastoral need (by pastoral I mean personal and practical) in that it addresses the subject of faith in the language of people today.

The remarkable thing about Jesus's sayings is that they are so simple, yet so profound. He spoke with authority (Matthew 7:29) about deep issues of the soul to the ordinary people of His day in language and stories they could easily understand.

It is in this spirit that I endeavor to convey the message of salvation; that is, in simple language, using story and images from contemporary life.