

Sermon for the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

'Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.'

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'Faith' is a heresy. A distinguished professor at the Fort Wayne seminary was ever pleased to remind us petty seminarians that there were three great false teachings: 'faith,' 'God', and 'and'; and the greatest of these false teachings was 'faith.' He was not wrong.

It is common these days to think of faith as a sort of thing, a substance, an item which one can have, and which one can lose. One can have 'great faith'. One can have 'little faith'. One can have 'found his faith.' One can have 'lost his faith.' In every case, 'faith' is something like a personal possession. This personal faith is defined as the degree to which one is sure that the Bible is true. This personal faith is not faith at all. It is a heresy.

Faith is not something that can be had. It is not something that a person can possess. One cannot keep his faith in a little bag, or in a little heart, or in a little mind. Faith cannot be kept at all. Faith is not so small that it can be held. Faith, rather, consumes, like a fire; it devours like the jaws of Sheol.

There is no personal faith. There is only 'The Faith', that Faith which we confess in the Nicene Creed. That faith which we do not own, but that owns us through our baptism; that we confess not because it is personal to us, but that we confess because we have become part of it.

For the Faith is nothing but the revelation of the promises of God. These promises need not be believed in in order to be true. They require no human to assent to them in order for them to come to pass. Even if all mankind were to fall into apostasy; to again worship idols, worship ideas, or worship nothing, the Faith would continue unaffected, undamaged, invincible, for the Faith is the revelation

of the promises of God, and what God has promised must and will come to pass; and no demon in hell or angel in heaven, no scheme of man or sophistry of the children of men can prevent this. *His will will be done.*

When we confess the Faith in the Most Holy Creed of our Fathers, we do not state what we think, but what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen.

Our Lord speaks to us, saying: *'When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?'* Perhaps He will not. Perhaps there will be *none that believe, no, not one.* And yet *the Son of Man comes.* This will happen. For *'God will bring justice to his chosen ones who cry out to Him day and night.'*

People falsely believe that if they doubt, if they worry, if they question, somehow God has disappeared, merely because He has disappeared from their own mind. But when one doubts, that is a change in the person, not a change in God. For God is ever there, ever present, ever accomplishing His will; ever completing His Gospel. One may forget the love of God. God's love has forgotten no one, and never shall it.

Christ teaches us: *'Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them.'* For to feed them is His will, regardless of whether or not the raven thinks he believes.

'And consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in his glory was not arrayed as one of these.' For to adorn them in glory is His will, regardless of whether or not the lily assents.

'Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life.' For your anxiety, your doubt, your belief, your disbelief; it all changes nothing; for *God is the same, yesterday, today, and forevermore,* and what He has revealed, the redemption of His people, the conquest of death and the final resurrection; these will come to pass, [even if every church close, and ever steeple torn down,] even if *faith is not found upon the earth.*

'Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain.' And for this he was murdered, knowing not the coming of the saving seed of Eve.

'Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark.' And though he survived the flood, yet went the way of all mortal men, into the earth.

'Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance.' That his children might be as many as the stars of the sky; yet one child he had; and that when he was *as good as dead*.

None of these saw the fulfillment of the promises given to them. *These all died in faith, not having received the things promised.* For it was not important that they receive them. It is only important that God promised them. It is not important what Abel or Noah or Abraham felt as they approached their last minutes; it only matters that they knew that God's will would be done. They did not have a heartfelt faith, a personal faith; by God's call, they were woven into the Faith, which is everlasting.

'You are anxious about many things.' You doubt. You wonder. 'Why would God do such a thing as this?' 'Why would God allow something as terrible as that?' 'But science says something different.' 'But can we still believe in our modern age?' 'But the Church is so corrupt.' 'The world is so evil.' *'You are anxious about many things.'*

You may have such doubts. You may believe such doubt to be evil. I tell you, such doubt as this, such that is not *unto death*, is but a glimmer of the light of faith. It is no different than the cry of the saints in white, calling out *'But thou, O Lord, how long?'* It is no different than the wailing of David, *'Why do the righteous suffer, and the wicked prosper?'* It is no different than the prayer of Habbakuk, who beseeched his God *'Why do you remain silent when the wicked devour the righteous?'* It is no different than the demand of Job *'I will say to God, do not condemn me; let me know why you contend against me? Does it seem good to you to oppress, to despise the work of your hands, and favor the designs of the wicked?'*

Such are the prayers not of the lost, dear Christian, but of the Saints; for though they are confounded, confused, doubting, angry, yet they cast all such doubt and wrath upon their God, who, regardless of anything else, is still and always there, or they would not pray. Even Christ cries out *'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'*

It is a demand for an answer. But before all else, it is knowledge that there is an answer, an answer that has been promised before all time, renewed in

every generation, which will come to pass, for *God is not a man that He should lie*. His will will be done.

'You are anxious about many things.' But *'do not be anxious about your life.'* For your anxiety matters nothing at all. It effects nothing at all. For whether or not you worry; whether or not you suffer; whether or not you doubt; behold the day is coming when *the woman shall be clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.*' Behold, the day is coming when the *Son of Man shall appear upon the clouds in glory and majesty.*

Behold, the day is coming, when Christ *shall make all things new*. And every doubt will be silenced; every question answered; every evil judged; for the final reconciliation is come.

'O Ye of little faith.' The day comes, inexorably and inevitably. The good day of our Lord.

'Fear not, little flock' for this is the faith [holy, catholic, and apostolic], that on that day, it will be *'your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.'*

'For he has prepared for you a city.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon texts: Genesis

15:1-6, Hebrews 11:1-16; Luke 12:22-34