

CHAPTER III

QUALITIES AND ORIGIN OF FAITH

Faith, as we have seen in the last chapter, embraces all the truths which the Church teaches, and which God has made known to us by the Patriarchs and the Prophets, and last of all by His only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Necessary qualities of Faith

Yet Faith to be of value must possess certain definite qualities: it must be *supernatural*—that is, in addition to its being elicited by the aid of grace, we must believe because God has spoken; it must be *firm* or unwavering, for when God has spoken, reason must be silent, and submit; it must be *entire* or *universal*—that is, it must embrace all revealed truths: "*Teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*" (Matt. xxviii. 20). We cannot doubt or call into question a single revealed truth without at the same time calling in question the Divine veracity, and thereby destroying the very foundation on which our Faith rests.

Our Faith must be *lively* and *constant*

Our Faith, moreover, should be *lively* and *constant*: *lively* in the sense that we should live up to it by ever avoiding evil and doing good; for that only, says St. Gregory, is true Faith which does not contradict in works what is believed in words. And St. James: "*As the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead*" (ii. 26). "*And if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains,*" says St. Paul, "*and have not charity, I am nothing*" (1 Cor. xiii. 2). Our Faith is *constant* or steadfast when we are ready to make any sacrifice rather than lose it: "*Whosoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven*" (Matt. x. 33).

Explicit and Implicit Faith

If Faith, then, must possess the qualities we have named, and if "*without Faith it is impossible to please God*" (Heb. xi. 6), we naturally ask ourselves the question, How can the Faith of the poor uninstructed Catholic be as that of the learned theologian? The difficulty is explained by showing that there are two ways in which we can believe the truths of Revelation—viz., either by *Explicit* or by *Implicit* Faith.

Our Faith is said to be *explicit* when the truths which we believe are known to us distinctly, and we give our assent to each separate article of our belief *in particular*. It is said to be *implicit* when we believe *in a general way* all revealed truths, although we do not know them distinctly and in particular.

Implicit Faith required of all

Now from the nature of Faith, and from our Lord's instructions to His Apostles, it is evident that we are bound to believe, at least with an *implicit* Faith, all that the Church believes and teaches; for He not only bade them go into the whole world and teach the observance of *all the things* which He had commanded them, but added: "*He that believeth not shall be condemned*" (Mark xvi. 16). Yet all Christians are not bound to know all the truths of Faith with an explicit knowledge of each separate truth; it is enough that their belief should extend in a general way to all that God has revealed to His Church.

Explicit Faith in certain truths necessary

The habit of Faith¹ infused into the soul in certain truths at Baptism is sufficient in the case of young children, and all such as never come to the use of reason. But all those who are capable of making an act of Faith are obliged to believe, *implicitly* at least, all that the Church believes and teaches, and *explicitly* some of the principal truths of Religion of which they cannot be ignorant without danger to their eternal salvation. Thus it is necessary to know, and explicitly believe, that there is a God who is the sovereign Lord of all things; and that there is a future state in which we shall be rewarded or punished according to our works in this life: "*Without faith it is impossible to please God; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and is a rewarder of them that seek Him*" (Heb. xi. 6).

It is, moreover, held by many theologians that, after the coming of Christ, we are required to believe explicitly, as necessary for salvation, the mysteries of the adorable Trinity (*i.e.*, the Unity and Trinity of God), and the Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection of our Saviour. These are contained in the Apostles' Creed.

We must also know and explicitly believe, at least in substance, the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Ten Commandments, the Commandments of the Church, and such Sacraments as we are bound to receive.

Faith infused into the soul at Baptism

Seeing, then, the absolute necessity of Faith for salvation, we naturally ask ourselves how we arrive at the possession of it. "*By grace you are saved through faith,*" says St. Paul, "*and this not of yourselves; for it is the gift of God*" (Eph. ii. 8). It cannot, therefore, be acquired by us, but is infused into the soul at Baptism. Christians at their Baptism receive the habit of Faith, which enables them, when they reach the years of discretion, and are duly instructed in the truths of Revelation, to elicit suitable acts of Faith. It is the beginning, foundation, and root of justification, and the first of all the virtues, since without Faith it is impossible to please God.

¹ The habit of Faith is a supernatural quality permanently inherent in the soul, enabling us, when we come to the use reason, to make supernatural acts of belief.