

# **Deepening Our Faith in Troubled Times**

**Fr. Virginus Osuagwu SDS — 2024-10-03**

**INTRODUCTION** — Fr. Virginus began his 5th talk to TASTE by highlighting the troubled times in which we live. It is not just the times that scripture describes as wars and rumors of wars, but he noted that godlessness is on the rise which is a far greater problem. All of creation is groaning and we too groan waiting for our bodies to be set free. There is chaos in the world and disorder in the family. Sadly, people don't like the things of God anymore and they simply look for all kinds of excitement in worldly pleasures. The consequence of all this is that people are troubled and depressed and they are looking for escape. Much like we hear in Psalm 55, they wish they had wings of a dove so that they might fly away and rest from this overwhelming doom.

**FAITH AS AN ESCAPE** — Thankfully, our loving and compassionate God has given us a way out and will not let us be tempted without providing a means of escape. The means of escape that God has given us is “FAITH” which is God's lifeline to us. Faith is the bridge that connects us to God and God to us. Surprisingly, as powerful as our emotions are when we cry and grumble, they do not move God! Rather, God is moved by two things — 1) by His word and 2) by our faith in His word. Our faith in His word is a sign of our trust in God which brings Him much pleasure as opposed to our doubt which brings Him much pain. While we are free to express our emotions with buckets of tears, they do not get us to the throne of Mercy where we could have found the help we needed. So faith is what God has given us to help us and oh how difficult it must be for people who do not have faith to survive in such difficult times.

**FAITH, LOVE, & SUBMISSION** — As Catholics, our faith is rooted in the Triune God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Our faith is the love story between humanity and an infinitely loving God who gifts us with Himself in creation fashioning us in His own image and likeness. From the fullness of His love, the invisible God moves among us in order to invite and receive us into His own company. Wow! The response to this invitation is faith. God so loved the world that He gave His only son so that anyone who believes in Him will not perish, but will have everlasting life. Again, our response to that offer of love is faith, which is a submission of the human will and intellect to God. Even if it does not make sense to us, by faith, we believe and trust in the whole truth that God reveals.

**PROFOUND INSIGHTS** — Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen. By faith, we understand that the universe was ordered by the Word of God, so that what is visible came into being through the invisible. Fr. Virginus asked us to take time to read Hebrews Chapter 11 since it is a very important text about faith and it gives us profound insights. Faith is now, not tomorrow, not yesterday. We should ask ourselves several questions — Where is God now? What is God saying now? Where is the movement of God in my life now? How do I interpret my dealings with God now as opposed to yesterday? By faith, we understand that what is seen was made from things that are not visible. So faith is spiritual; faith is Supernatural; faith is contrary to flawed human nature. Unlike human nature that walks by sight (and all that the senses offer), faith rises above the senses to those realities that endure although they are unseen. Faith is not convenient, nor exciting to the senses. The world says “seeing is believing,” but we know differently. The foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom. And this is why when things are not going well, we can still say thank you Jesus. Faith is for the days of darkness, it is an act of righteousness, and without faith, it is impossible to please God.

**TRANSFORMATIVE FAITH** — Jesus said “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day.” This is God's gift given to us. On the other side of it is our response to that gift which is our participation. Our faith demonstrates our own mental and intellectual ascent to the truth that God has revealed. Moreover, our living faith is “transformative” in that it allows what God has revealed to change us and that is a kind of faith that we need in a world such as this. Others can then see in us something that is different, something that is tangible, something that is life-giving. Jesus says it well when he says let your light shine so that others may see your good works and give glory to your Heavenly Father. So, living faith transforms us as it changes: how we think, how we talk, how we act, and how we live. Everything is viewed from the lens of our relationship with God. We believe what God says in spite of human sensory evidence. And while we still live in this world, faith transforms the manner in which we live in the world. We can do this because we understand that while we live and have a responsibility here, we are here as stewards of God's resources, grace, and presence because we are carriers of His presence. We are responsible stewards and not owners because, in the kingdom of God, no one owns anything. Faith is counter-cultural. Our faith gives us the opportunity to eliminate activities that are not life-giving for something higher and better.

**TESTED FAITH** — The troubles and circumstances of life challenge our faith and come as a test of what we say we believe. When we come to serve the Lord, we must be prepared for trials. But the good news is the story does not end with Good Friday. So even in our suffering and pain, the Friday is still “good” Friday. Every person must be tested in the journey of life. What will you do if you lose your child to a careless or drunk driver? Or if you lose your house? Or if the doctor informs you that you have cancer? Will you still be able to sing the songs of Zion and thank God in your pain?

**UNANSWERED PRAYERS** — On the day of trial when we have prayed unceasingly and the problem still exists, how do we respond? Sadly, this is when some people turn away from God and stop going to church. Fr. Virginus told the story of him visiting a man in a senior living facility whose wife spent most of her life in church praying and she died of cancer. The elderly man anticipated that Fr. Virginus would suggest he continue to go to church and thus asked him to leave. A few weeks later the man came face-to-face with what is next beyond his own life, and so he requested a visit with Fr. Virginus, and apologized for the way he treated him. Fr. Virginus had a good conversation with him, anointed him, and the man died the very next day. The wise elderly man realized that if he made the wrong choice, it would be for eternity and so he chose to be in good standing. So when our prayers remain unanswered, let us trust God and His will for us.

**TRUST BEYOND FAITH** — Our faith must go beyond just faith. It must come to a place of “trust” and that is what we see in the three young men in the book of Daniel Chapter 3. Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego realized that there was no need to defend themselves. In this trial, they trusted in God knowing that God has the power to save and to deliver them from the furnace, but also knowing that God can decide to let them die. Regardless of what God may do, they were committed to serve Him. Even if God does not choose to save us in our trials, it means nothing because we will still love Him & we will still serve Him because He is still our God. This is the kind of faith that can survive these troubled times.

**REJOICE** — Paul tells us that we “rejoice” in our troubles because there is always a purpose to affliction. Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God. Not only do we boast in hope of the glory of God, but we even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope, and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

**WORK FOR GOOD** — Some of us would not have become who we are today had we not gone through our trials. After Fr. Virginus was shot years ago, he had to depend on people because he could not bend down and the doctor gave him many restrictions. He could not do his own laundry, he could not look at a computer screen, he could not even cross the road himself. He needed someone to hold his hand and he realized that all that we are and all that we ever want to be is found in God. Through this experience, God taught him “compassion” — the greatest of lessons in his time of pain. Without this trial, he may not have been here. As he looks back, he can now see how God wrote a story out of what he thought was a mess. Likewise, let us have faith in God’s will & His divine providence during our most challenging times.

**PRACTICAL WAYS TO DEEPEN OUR FAITH** — So, how do we deepen our faith?

- **Through Love** — You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. Love is what helps us keep connected to God even when everything around us says otherwise.
- **By Hearing the Word of God** — Take heed what you hear and who you listen to. Sadly, sometimes even when we know that what we hear is hurting, killing, or depressing us, we may still continue to listen. The ear is a window; the eye is a window; and we become what we listen to. Since faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the Word of Christ, let us regularly read and listen to the inspired Word of God since it is spirit and life for us.
- **By Prayer, Petition, and Thanksgiving** — Our God desires us to be unceasing and persistent in prayer. Not only does this prevent us from being anxious, but it deepens our faith in every situation and circumstance.
- **By Works of Charity** — Faith without works is dead. We demonstrate our faith by our works of charity.
- **By understanding** — We must have an understanding that it is in the storms of life, God most manifests Himself and so what we are going through right now may not be demonic, but rather may simply be because God is proud of us! Recall Job suffered because God was proud of him and he was in the middle of a battle he did not understand.
- **By Seeking to Understand that God May be Protecting Us** — Fr. Virginus told the story about going 3 times to get his driver’s license and then wanting to know what God was saying. After spending 6 hours in prayer throughout the night, the Lord let him know that if he got his license, he would have killed himself and he would have driven himself to death. So it was out of God’s love for him, that he was held back until that storm was over and then it was easy!
- **By Trusting in God’s Timing and Sovereignty** — There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under Heaven. If it is not the right time or the right season, we will get the wrong result. Trust God’s timing & sovereignty.
- **By Holding on to God’s Promises** — God promises to be with us, to strengthen us, and to help us. He also promises that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.
- **By Being Grateful** — We must be grateful. We are called to rejoice always and give thanks to God. We can sing songs of Zion even in our pain, even in our trouble, even in our uncertainty, and even when we don’t see any headway.

**IN CLOSING** — If someone can look at us when our pain is intense and we can still say “Lord, I love you regardless,” that is our testimony and our witness that this generation needs. But if we cannot rise to that occasion, the emptiness and the vacuum that our inability creates has huge impacts on others. And even though we may groan like creation, we must be like the midwives who help others give birth to the mystery that God has put in them. The bottom line is rejoice always, delight in your faith, be unceasing and persistent in your prayer, and no matter the circumstance, be thankful.