

On this most blessed day of our Church calendar, as we ponder the mystery of the Christ, the astonishing news of a tortured dead man apparently resurrected, we must face the question every Christian faces at some point in their lives. What do we believe? What do *you* believe?

It's somewhat fashionable among elite and scholarly circles these days to claim a certain type of atheism, an intellectually derived claim that God is unimportant, indeed irrelevant to our human existence. In fact, with breathless bravado, we are told that God is not simply irrelevant, he is non-existent. What do *you* believe? Our own spiritual belief system has to start here, for without a belief in God, why bother with a belief in anything else?

Now this is when most theologians will launch into various intellectual arguments for the existence of God, and to a certain degree, these discussions are interesting and fruitful. At another level, however, they are less than optimal, for it is far too easy to fall into the trap of trying to use scientific methods and logical syllogisms to prove that God exists. The stark truth of the matter is that you will never get to a convincing proof of the existence of God by using your head. You need *faith*.

Now before you tune out because of that vague word, *faith*, allow me to define this term in a perhaps unusual way. First, what faith is *not*. Faith is not the same thing as belief, or adhering to some dogma, or obeying some command from the pulpit. Faith has nothing to do with the Pope or even for that matter the Catholic Church. Belief, dogma, the Pope, and the Church are all *responses* to faith – they are dependent on faith. They follow faith. So what is faith? Faith, brothers and sisters, is simply accepting *what you already know to be true*.

So, what do you know to be true? Let me suggest four very unscientific concepts that I bet you know very intimately and from deep within. The first is *beauty*. Beauty is hard to define, but we can try. It's the combination of qualities that make something pleasing and impressive to look at, listen to, touch, smell, or taste. Beauty is soothing to the soul and a delight to experience. Each of us knows beauty when we see it, don't we? You know beauty.

The second concept is *goodness*. Goodness embodies virtue and kindness, high qualities that attract us and impress us. Someone who is good is always in high demand, for goodness is like a light shining in the darkness. It's hard to measure goodness scientifically, isn't it? But just like beauty, we know it when we see it, know it when we encounter it.

The third concept is *truth*. As human beings, we all seem to have a very well-tuned sense of truth, an almost intuitive appreciation for the reality of things. Some think it is hard-wired into our psyches, this innate sense of right and wrong, of honesty and falsehood. A good measure of the truth of something is how our gut reacts when we hear a claim. Falsehood can confuse us momentarily, either due to the skill of the liar, or the clever way it misleads us. But in the end, our gut will tell us whether it is true or not.

So let's pause a moment. I said that faith is simply accepting what you already know to be true. You know beauty. You know goodness. You know truth itself. Well guess what? If you know beauty, goodness, and truth, you know God. Because beauty, goodness, and truth define who God is. How do I know this? Because beauty, goodness, and truth are the lures, the bait, that God tosses out to lead us all to him. God gives us a beautiful creation, with sunsets and roses and the smell of baking bread. We're attracted. Then we explore some more and we see that the world has good and bad in it, and we are drawn to the good, to the virtuous, to the people who exhibit this quality. You all know at least one person like that, right? I hope so! And when your senses are full of beauty and your heart is impressed by goodness, only then do you engage the brain and seek the ever-present truth. The search for truth is the lifelong journey we call the spiritual path.

Now to the fourth concept (for those who were counting and wondered why I stopped). You see the fourth concept that you know to be true is simply the combination of beauty, goodness and truth. We have a word for it – *love*. In the end, it's simple. If you believe in beauty, goodness, and truth, you certainly believe in love. And if you believe in love, you believe in God. Because St. John, in his amazingly profound insight, said it simply and perfectly. God is love. Love is God.

If you believe in love, then you believe in God. You have faith. You are simply accepting what you already know to be true. How does that feel? Isn't it great to have faith? Isn't it great to know that you've had it all along?

Today is Easter. Today Jesus shows us the final truth, the final expression of God's beauty, goodness, and love. Jesus shows us that death, our greatest fear, is not the end, but somehow the beginning of something profoundly exciting and new. It's available to all of us who have faith. I guess that's all of us! You already know it to be true. You know that this world can't be the end of everything; it's just not possible. Our gut doesn't buy it.

One last question. Do you ever get tired of beauty, goodness, and truth? Do you ever think, oh gosh, if I see one more beautiful flower or hear one more moving piece of music, or learn one more truth about the world, I'll just have to go hide? I don't think so. Our whole life is a day to day search for more beauty, goodness, and truth. Take a guess what heaven is all about. For some strange reason, I don't think we'll be bored when we get there. How could we? Beauty, goodness, truth, love, the very essence of who God is, will permeate heaven.

So the next time someone tells you, "I don't believe in God" ask them, "Oh? So you don't believe in love? Or beauty? Or truth? Or goodness? What a sad and frightening world this must be for you!" Then tell them some good news...whether or not you believe in God, God most certainly believes in you. And he's dangling this bait...