



## September 2009

Last week, I was discussing the first section of the Catechism of the Catholic Church with our seminarians in Pre-Theology during a formation session. The catechism raises very eloquently the whole idea that faith is the human response to an experience of God's self-revelation. God clearly, yet mysteriously, manifests His presence to people, inviting them into relationship, eliciting a response of belief. I ended up having a profound conversation with our new seminarians about the paradox of faith: why some people believe in God and others don't, how God feels very close at times and other moments seems absent.

Then, from there, we talked about why faith is so difficult for so many people in our culture. How the whole question of God seems irrelevant to a material life experienced on the plane of over-work, escapist leisure, casual relationships and a surfeit of possessions. How our perceived self-sufficiency and exhausting busyness prevent many from ever entering the disorienting darkness and silence of a faith response, which shatters our illusion of separateness. How the meta-narrative or overarching story of Jesus Christ no longer seems compelling as the guiding script for the individual dramas of so many millions of precious human lives.

As future priests, I asked, how will you get at the real stuff in people's complicated lives? How will you reach hearts and minds with the liberating power of faith? How do we speak about God to a post-modern world that seems to purposely shut the doors and windows against the invasive light of the transcendent? What does a breathing, living Catholicism look like in 21st century America? How can we help people to see that they have already experienced God, especially when they don't know it at all?

The Pre-Theologians and I found some great answers to these questions in the Catechism and in our shared experiences. Isn't it through realities as varied as physical pain, the beauty of a sunset, falling in love, grieving the death of a friend, studying the order and harmony of the earth and coming up against our moral limitations that we somehow are taken beyond ourselves and suddenly discover God? An important aspect of pastoral ministry has to be accompanying folks through the open doors of suffering, beauty, sin, love, loss, friendship, order and death into the vast infinite space of the Divine Mystery.

An important aspect of our Catholic faith is that doctrine, creeds and ecclesial statements can only illuminate, protect and communicate the reality of God; they are not the reality itself. And so, we do not ultimately believe in verbal formulations of faith, as important and indispensable as they are; we place our faith in the One who stands within, behind and beyond the words, the One who is always present, yet elusively just out of reach. We believe in the Word, Jesus Christ, who gives meaning, texture and force to all human words spoken in truth and love.

Questions that everyone preparing for ministry in the Church and indeed every baptized person must struggle with are: how can I give consistent, clear and loving witness to God through the

entire texture of my life? How can I help those around me to discover the electrifying, liberating, saving power of faith? I always say that Catholicism is so beautiful that only God could have made it up! How do we share that with others? How do you share it? I would love to hear your responses!

P.S. Please mark your calendars:

- The Friday, Oct. 2 annual Seminary Dinner is upon us. There is still time to sign up. Just reply to this email to register or to get more information.
- 11 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 3 is our next radio show on Relevant Radio, which airs the first Saturday of every month. Please tune in to hear about your Seminary's New Heart, New Spirit.

P.P.S. I always welcome your ideas and comments. Please email us at [newheartnewspirit@sfs.edu](mailto:newheartnewspirit@sfs.edu) any time with questions or ideas for the Seminary or the radio show. Thank you!

