

Chaplain's Bulletin August 4, 2024



Dear Folks,

This is week 2 of our journey through John 6 (vv. 24-35). Today I will focus on the phrase “Who comes to me shall not hunger; who believes in me shall not thirst.” A critical concept in the New Testament, and one especially emphasized in John, is belief (or faith). What does it mean?

Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament has some lengthy things to say about the Greek words “pistis” (belief/faith) and “pisteuo” (to believe/to have faith). It can mean believe, obey (try reading Hebrews 11 in this sense), trust, hope, be faithful. As I understand it, the Hebrew mindset was less likely to see a division between internal belief and external action than the Greek mindset (in the West, we tend to have our thinking shaped by a Greek mindset). If, for example, I say that the best way to live includes keeping healthy with diet and exercise but I spend all my time sitting on the couch eating chips, I don't really believe that.

During the New Testament period, the big argument was about whether right relationship (justification/righteousness) came from works of the Law of Moses (things like circumcision and keeping kosher) or faithfulness to Jesus. We find this especially in Acts, Romans and Galatians. We see, for example in Romans 4 that St. Paul argues that Abraham was declared righteous before he was circumcised.

The letter James deals with believers in the diaspora (those scattered around the Greek speaking world) who tended to have a more Greek way of thinking. I imagine people saying, “All I need is faith? Great, I'll just think the right thoughts and don't need to examine my behavior.” James responded, “You believe that God is one. You do well. Even the demons believe that and tremble. Do you want proof, you ignoramus, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by his works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works and faith was completed by his works. Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed in God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,’ and he was called ‘the friend of God.’ See how a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by a different route? For just as a body without a spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead (James 2:19-26).” I suggest when St. Paul says “faith” he means the same thing that James means by “faith and works.”

When we gather for the Eucharist, we are first called to faith in the fullest sense. This starts with the penitential rite, as we reject the actions in which we had put more faith in the promises of sin than the promises of God. Then we celebrate the liturgy of the Word to strengthen our faith. To receive the Eucharist without rejecting our sins is serious. See 1 Corinthians 11:23-31.

Lord, increase our faith.

Blessings,
Fr. Jim