

## **Faith of the Heart: Commentary**

**by Richard Loehrlein, SM**

We do not recognize Jesus Christ in our soul when we cause the light of faith to enter. It is not as Man, such as he is in the Holy Eucharist, that he dwells in us, but as the Word of God.

But if we do not see him there, we feel all the qualities that he attributes to himself: I am the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6). By the light of faith and by the faith which this light produces in us, we come to know the truth of God; it animates us; it is our life; it shows us what we must do, the road we must follow.

If the light of faith is the Word of God, if because of it the adorable Word comes to live within us, then we understand that faith, the conviction resulting from the impression of this light, is precisely the union of Jesus Christ with us, a union which goes so far as to transform us into Jesus Christ. By faith we think as Jesus Christ thinks, it is Jesus Christ who unites himself to our heart. By faith our guided will acts only as Jesus Christ acts; it is Jesus Christ who unites himself to our will. Thus the new self is formed within us.<sup>1</sup>

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### **Richard's Commentary**

The light of faith, says Father Chaminade, is like the sun that brightens our day so we can see everything clearly, if we have the eyes that can see. One of the qualities of light is that it is invisible to the eye, while it makes other things visible by reflection. God illumines the words (from ordinary revelation usually, without visions or audible words), so that we learn the Truth—what we must do, the road we must follow. The Word of God, Second Person of the Trinity, is this Light.

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<sup>1</sup> Father Chaminade, *Ninth Instruction Given in the Retreat of 1818*: "Have Faith In God," section 3. (At the end of this retreat the first Brothers professed their vows.)

As a spiritual being, the Word of God can be present and unseen, while human words make the Word to be present to us by our faith. It is as if our words which express our faith are a type of sacrament that makes the Word of God present to us. By our openness to him, God slips into us by the human word, unless we refuse to accept it. However, if we are open and receptive like Mary of Nazareth, anything is possible! The Word of God is powerful to do what it expresses. Mary became pregnant with the Word of God and gave birth to a child. By our faith in the Word of God we become children of God. By this sincere gift of self in response to God, we can grow in a communion of Love with the Word of God.

In the Eucharistic Bread, the Body and Blood, the soul and divinity of Jesus is present. But we receive the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity present in human words.

Father Chaminade says the Word comes into us in silence, but this Word is the bright Light, Jesus, who is the Second Person of the Trinity. This Light clarifies everything. So, Jesus silently enters as we read or listen to the Word of God read to us. The words we hear are like a sacramental presence of the Word who is the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, and who became incarnate in the womb of Mary. But in order to be able to see the object revealed, we need "Purity of Heart" (Mt 5:8). Without it, even this lesson of Father Chaminade can remain obscure or unseen, a puzzle of words.

This Word of God is a Person and is experienced by what he does in us. The "fruits" of the Spirit are listed in Galatians 5, while the "gifts" of the Spirit are scattered throughout the New Testament, but especially in 1 Corinthians. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and he definitely changes us, develops the fruits that can be enjoyed, such as peace, joy, gentleness, chastity, etc., or faith, hope and charity, etc. As Jesus said, "By their fruits you shall know them." And Romans 5:5 tells us of divine love that the Holy Spirit pours into our hearts.

Father Chaminade says there is a basic distinction between "faith" and "the light of faith." According to Hebrews 11:1, we read: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." So, the assurance we have is that the Word tells us the Truth.

Now, the “light of the Faith” is what causes the assurance, like sunlight revealing the flowers. And Father Chaminade is saying that our assurance or conviction comes from “the union of Jesus Christ with us; a union which goes so far as to transform us into Jesus Christ.” Blessed Chaminade even says that “it is Jesus Christ who unites himself to our heart.”

Heart to heart. A communion of persons is established, one of love. Jesus made himself a gift to all humankind on the cross. And in the Lord’s Supper that Jesus ate the night before his Passion, he took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying the following.

“Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is my Body, which will be given up for you.”

And when the supper was ended, he took a chalice and giving thanks, he said the blessing, and gave the cup to his disciples saying:

“Take this, all of you, and drink from it, for this is the chalice of my Blood, the Blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in memory of me.”

He made a gift of himself to us. And when we receive him and return the gift of ourselves to him, we become fully who we are: “children of the Father!” Jesus transforms us. And this love relationship, Faith of the Heart, is the greatest proof of all the realities of our faith. No rational proof for the existence of God or any other divinely revealed reality has this kind of personal strength of conviction. We believe (are convinced) because of the experience of the love of Jesus for us.

The union accomplished by Jesus with us is a unity of the two into one. It is a union of harmony, like two musical instruments playing the same melody: one sound. In this love relationship, our life is not destroyed, but enhanced. We do not lose our individuality, our personality, our personal freedom. We are brought into a communion with Jesus,

much as in the marital embrace where the two become one, much as in the Trinity where there are three in one.

I understand Blessed Father Chaminade's "Faith of the Heart" to be a communion of love with Jesus who enters my life through the Word of God, read, spoken, or adored. I understand that this is the same relationship that John of the Cross discussed as 'the mystical marriage.' I appreciate what St. John says about "the dark night of the soul," for Blessed Chaminade said, "We do not recognize Jesus Christ in our soul when we cause the light of faith to enter." The fruit that is born of the union is the evidence of the communion.

We are one with Jesus. Imagine with me, please. Pray the Rosary. The words we use are divinely revealed: the Word of God. The Creed, the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Glory be to the Father . . . these words are from Sacred Scripture. They are the Word of God. The human words are like a sacrament that makes present within us the eternal Word of God, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity. When we pray the Rosary, Jesus—the Word of God who became Incarnate in the womb of Mary—prays with us in total harmony, honoring all that his Mother had done for him here on earth. That's why they are truly the mysteries of the rosary, and that explains why the rosary is so powerful.

One of the reasons why Marianist life is so attractive is this communion with Jesus in faith of the heart. It is evident in the charism of the Marianists. Marianist spirituality is an experience of life and love in this holy communion with Jesus. We have five traits to our charism:

1. Faith, Faith of the Heart. This is the loving communion with Jesus.
2. Alliance with Mary. This is a loving communion with the Mother of Jesus.
3. Family Spirit. This is a love relationship evident in the life among the brothers.
4. Mixed composition is lived with God's spirit of inclusivity in all the Marianist communities, lay and religious.
5. Mission. Love wants to share its wealth and bear fruit.

Most recently, when the new *Roman Missal* was published, I found that one of the new Eucharistic prayers, number V3 (“Jesus, the Way to the Father”) reflected Father Chaminade’s teaching.

The Preface of this Eucharistic prayer states:

For by your Word you created the world and you govern all things in harmony. You gave us the same Word made flesh as Mediator, and he has spoken your words to us and called us to follow him. He is the way that leads to you, the truth that sets us free, the life that fills us with gladness.

In the Retreat of 1818 in the Ninth Conference, Father Chaminade had taught:

But if we do not see him there, we feel all the qualities that he attributes to himself: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Jn 14:6). By the light of faith, and by the faith which this light produces in us, we come to know the truth of God; it animates us; it is our life; it shows us what we must do, the road we must follow.

I am very excited about this latest development!