

# 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Year

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Last Sunday St Paul told us, “There are three things that last: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love.” Today he reminds us that the primacy he gives to love does not mean that faith is unimportant. “The Gospel will save you only if you keep believing exactly what I preached to you – believing anything else will not lead to anything.” St Paul is talking about faith in the sense of what we believe and not simply the virtue of putting our trust in God. At each Sunday Mass we join in saying the Creed. We believe in one God. We believe in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. At the centre of the Creed are words that expand the simple profession of faith we find clearly stated in St Paul’s letter: we believe that “Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised to life on the third day.” We believe in all that Jesus has done and promised through the power of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

St Paul emphasises the importance of faith, but why? Faith, hope and love are intertwined. Faith without love is dead – a belief system that does not move the heart or motivate us. Hope without a solid basis in faith is blind optimism that shuts our eyes to real dangers and challenges to action. Love without faith and hope lacks direction and can become sentimentality lacking concrete expression. This is why St Paul says “believing anything else will not lead to anything.” It is not that we must just believe something – anything! It is true that any set of beliefs can drive or motivate us, but surely it matters whether what we believe is true?

St Paul emphasises that what he is asking the people of Corinth to believe is not something he has made up – a human philosophy – but the Good news he received not only through his vision on the road to Damascus but through the witness of the other apostles and the wider group of disciples. Why does he believe the unlikely story that he had tried to suppress, that Jesus had risen from the dead? He believes it because he trusts the evidence not just of Peter and the twelve, or James, but also the five hundred. He says, “Most of them are still alive - if you don’t believe me, go and ask them!” Belief that Jesus died and rose again changes everything. Life after death is not just a possibility but a reality and a promise. Jesus was truly man. He lived and died in his human nature. He rose in his human body – not just as a spiritual apparition. If we truly believe this it changes our whole perspective on life. We see all that happens to us in the light of eternity. We have hope whatever life throws at us. All that we do in love is of eternal value.

Isaiah, St Peter and St Paul all had vivid personal experiences of God that transformed their lives. That encounter was a shock to the system. Isaiah and Peter were initially devastated by the realisation that there was a world that passed their comprehension – the holiness of God. But God raised them up and sent them out on a mission. Not all of us have the same vivid encounter with God that makes our faith real but what we believe is true – we have the witness of the Apostles handed on through the scriptures and the life of the Church over two thousand years. In faith we encounter the living God at each Mass, each time we receive Holy Communion. We join with others in professing our faith but it must always be MY profession of faith – a personal testimony to what we believe and what governs our lives. This is why when the translation was revised it returned to the singular ‘I believe.’ May our Creed today be a true act of faith for each one of us. May it give direction and purpose to our hope for the future. May it inspire us to love without counting the cost.