

God?

This "force"—I wait and hope for it...even though my life seems like a huge question mark!

I'm aware of how weighted down I am.

I feel incapable of going out to look for this force, but it can come to meet me...

Maybe that's even what it's doing right now, sharpening my thirst for peace.

I have no idea.

It's an enormous question. God?

Who can answer with certainty?

• BERNARD GIRAUDEAU

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faith matters

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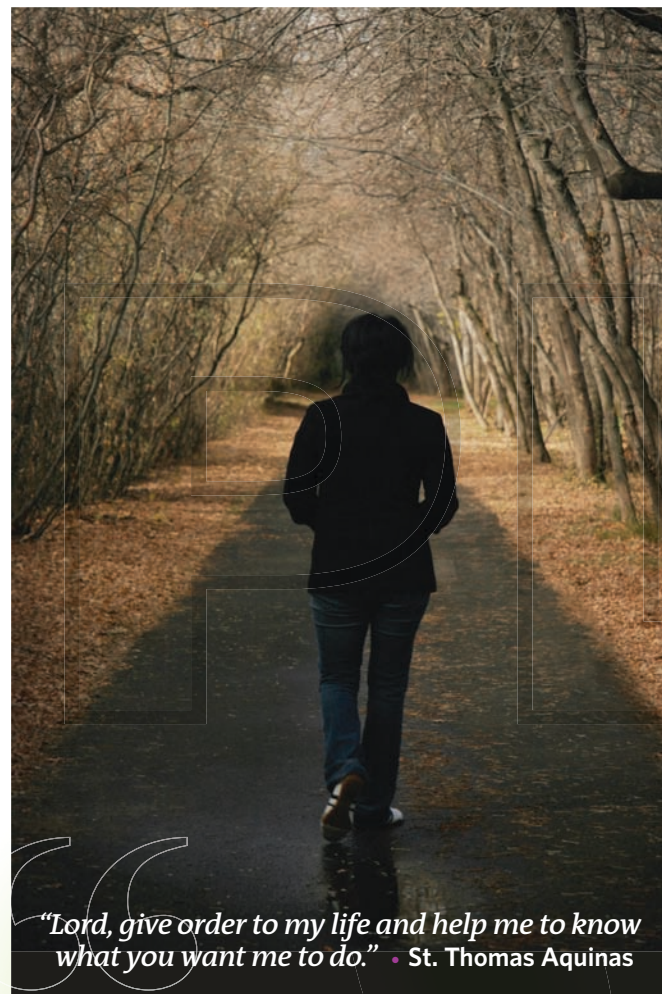
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I've lost
my faith...

faith matters



"Lord, give order to my life and help me to know what you want me to do." • St. Thomas Aquinas

Have you lost your faith?

A LOT OF TIMES IT'S ONLY AFTER A SLOW AND GRADUAL PROCESS that you start saying to yourself—and then to others—that you've lost your faith.

You no longer believe in a personal God who speaks to us. You think he doesn't really exist. You turn away from the Church and its teachings. You stop believing in the great affirmations of the Creed: eternal life, resurrection...it all seems fake and childish.

But just as often, it's the question of evil and suffering eating away at you: "If God really existed, he wouldn't let this happen."

You slide slowly from faith to indifference. You think and say, "Religion just isn't my cup of tea

anymore. It doesn't matter to me, I don't care anymore."

"I've lost my faith." Is it really so cut and dried? Is faith something you can lose the same way you lose your wallet or your keys?



What is faith?

FAITH IS EXPRESSED BY HABITS: going to midnight Mass, lighting a candle in a church...but faith is more than that.

Faith is the confident answer to a call that feels as though it were a thirst, a strong desire to move toward someone, an overflowing of the self. It is recognizing the God of the gospels in him who beckons and draws us near, inviting us to walk with him. Faith is responding to him through how we live our lives.

But we often no longer believe that God is the

source of this impulse. For that matter, do we really need a God who talks to us like a friend talks to a friend? Not always. Often, we even have good reasons to stop believing.

Where is God?

IT'S NOT EASY TO RECOGNIZE THAT GOD SPEAKS TO HUMANS. How can we hear someone we can't see? Someone whose presence we have to guess at? It would be so simple if God were right out in the open! Still, so often it's just a matter of looking a little closer...

Faith and wounds

WHOMAS NOT BEEN HURT OR SHOCKED by the behavior of a priest, or the attitude of a Christian? Certain recent scandals have discredited the Church and damaged its reputation, not to mention the attitudes of the Church through the course of history. The Church and Christians have had their fair share of weakness and imperfection.

Faith and refusal

CERTAIN TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH AREN'T EASY TO DIGEST, and sometimes cause the outraged or uncomfortable faithful to leave—those concerning sexuality, contraception, or euthanasia, for example. These people often wonder what business the pope

or the bishops have getting involved in these issues—without seeking to understand what the pope and bishops are saying and why they're saying it.

Faith and doubts

WHAT WE CALL "LOSING OUR FAITH" is often just casting doubt on it. We start wondering. We begin to doubt the truth of the Scriptures. Maybe we lose confidence in the Church that transmits the content of the faith, as well. We accuse it of having complicated the message with "dogmas" that we refuse to believe.

Now, to believe does not mean to abandon reason. It simply means adhering to transmitted truths that give meaning to life, all the while applying our intelligence to them.

"God is speaking, even when he is silent..." » Benedict XVI

Faith and trials

QUITE OFTEN, IT'S THE MAJOR TRIALS OF OUR LIVES that distance us from God. The illness, suffering, and death of a child are a tragedy, especially if we have prayed for that child to get better. How could a loving God permit such a thing? At such times, the feeling of life's absurdity comes back with full force, and we turn away in anger. Still, how many people attest to God's tenderness in their greatest suffering?

And yet...

WE'VE ALL SEEN IT: It's easy to let your faith die. For faith, which also means confidence, is not easy to keep. All the great saints speak of their doubts, their difficulties in prayer, their discouragements, their struggles to carry on.

Saint Paul said that faith was a "battle." And indeed, it takes courage to preserve

your faith in spite of everything. It takes courage to keep praying, to speak to God even when it's hard and you're not feeling anything—even if it's just to shout out your suffering.

Sometimes we need to look for answers to these questions, examine Bible passages, or spend time with someone who makes us want to believe again. Faith often crumbles simply from ignorance, or from trying to fit in. But that doesn't mean we're not yearning for something greater than ourselves. And that something, which may turn into someone, is often given to those who seek it out. The day you do so will be the day you taste real joy. ●

"I held on to Mary"

● "Losing faith? Oh, yes, I know all about that. Suddenly God starts to seem gray and insipid. Worse than that: Your life seems like it's been erased. I was afraid I'd lost it for good. I felt a chill of distress when I remembered my childhood, which was completely imbued with God and which all of a sudden no longer made any sense. Yes—but I never stopped praying to Mary at night before going to sleep. Never. Even when I was floundering around and I had stopped attending Sunday Mass."

"I forgot to pray"

● "For many long years I often forgot to pray seriously. Then one day, I decided to go back to Mass. It was terrible! For several months I cried like a baby behind my sunglasses and went through a pack of

Kleenex at every service. Every Sunday was like getting shock therapy! Then I got to know the people sitting near me. I started to relax. Then one day I went to confession so I'd be able to take communion, and I got back into the swing of things."

"Never give up!"

● "I don't know whether or not I'm in the process of losing my faith. Sometimes I tell myself that maybe I never had it in the first place, that it was never solid. Keeping your faith and making it grow is a battle. And in life of course there are moments when you give up, but I still dare to hope, maybe to convince myself that God will never give up, no matter where each person's path might lead them."



THOUGHTS FROM CATHOLICS