

What does FAITHFULNESS mean as a fruit of the Spirit – including in the context of work – and what can be done to make it actionable?

The fruits of the Holy Spirit are the signs and actions that the Holy Spirit is alive within us and helping us live by faith in our daily lives.

“What does FAITHFULNESS mean as a fruit of the Spirit – including in the context of work – and what can be done to make it actionable?”

Sister Mary Francis Power, ESEH, shared her thoughts and engaged in a discussion on this topic during the BELIEVES session held on Tuesday, August 9, 2022.



Sister, who is a Catholic Sister of the Eudist Servants of the Eleventh Hour, shared that the Association of Sisters she is a part of, is one for women called later in life, and make their Vows between the ages of 45-65, then serve the least of our brothers and sisters, primarily in prison ministry.

They follow the spirituality of St. John Eudes, and the foundress of the Eudist Servants, Mother Antonia Brenner, who chose to live in a cell in the Tijuana prison for over 30 years, yet never committed a crime. She served the “imprisoned Christ.”

Sister added that the foundress recognized the importance of family and never wanted those that joined to separate themselves from their families completely. Thus, Sister, who was previously married, is retired from working for the Federal government, has three grown sons, is self-sufficient, and lives in proximity to family.

“I live close to one of my three sons, who lives in Canton, GA.” she said. “I am getting older and need to live closer to family.”

In addition to ministry in Georgia prisons, Sister works at the council-level with St. Vincent DePaul Georgia as their Spiritual Advisor.

In her opinion, when it comes to faithfulness, Hebrews 11:1 – “Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen.” – provides a great definition of faith.

“It is not something that is always tangible,” she explained. “Faith seems illogical and requires us to suspend our logic and rely on faith.”

For those who can be faith-filled and think logically, she says, “Good for them that they can think logically and also believe in God. Because some people cannot move beyond logic and reason; and therefore, it is difficult for them to believe in God.”

She then added, "The more we trust God, the more we see his unconditional love for us. If we just trust Him, it all makes sense, because we take care of others, and he takes care of us in His Providence for us and for them."

One way she believes faith in God can be experienced is in serving those who suffer.

"Faith is a good fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is intangible and you can't always see it, but sometimes you can, if you are open to seeing faith at work."

When considered in the context of work, what does faithfulness look like, according to Sister?

Before she was a Sister, she shared that she had a close relationship with Jesus, but she never "took Him to work with her."

"If I was having 86% good outcomes before, once I 'took Him to work with me,' the outcomes were 110% good afterwards. Of course, these are random percentages, only to express this comparison."

Though speaking about this in the context of work, she mentioned that the same results are there in everything else, including in personal situations, like when someone is dying for example.

"You're going through a lot at that time," she stated. "The same would be the case for an employee who suffered a loss. In both situations, praying and letting Jesus walk with you and others, brings peace."

In terms of faithfulness becoming actionable, Sister believes that when we integrate faith into our work life, we are choosing to be faithful.

"Every work environment is different," said Sister. "I have worked in the Air Force, corporate, real estate, and another Federal government agency. It is the same everywhere, and the presence of prayer, either privately, or with others, makes a significant difference in the work place."

Interestingly, Sister commented that in her time spent with inmates in prison, she's learned that when they approach her, she'll often ask them, "What's your prayer life like?"

"Then I am quiet and listen."

When they respond she adds, "It's always the same. They'll tell me, 'I guess I'm not praying much/enough.'"

For her personally, Sister told everyone that she prays before, during, and after such encounters.

She asks them if they're OK if she prays with them, and most of the time they'll say, "Yes, please."

She does this in other daily situations as well outside of the prison setting, like when she is at a restaurant.

"I have witnessed waiters who cry when asked this question. It is very touching to them that someone would care to pray for, or with them."

Ultimately, Sister believes that making faithfulness actionable, first entails needing to be faithful to ourselves and God.

"This includes not lying, gossiping, or committing adultery," she remarked. "Satan is active now more than ever. We must stay faithful in our beliefs. And we must choose to see everyone with charity and patience."

Commenting further, she said, "Although actionable faithfulness may be more challenging to do, a person who is loyal to their faith in the workplace, abiding by the teachings of Christ, may (1) sleep better at night, (2) possibly be better respected by others, and (3) be seen as a person of integrity and a person who can be trusted, all while at the same time remaining loyal to the company."

When reflecting on her prior years before she retired, Sister told those in attendance that she had worked in Air Force International Affairs with the Pentagon.

"I worked full-time, priced aircraft, helicopters, and missiles for sale to other countries. Then as a mother, raised our children with my husband. Was I the best mother I could be?" she asked open-endedly.

Though she was also a Boy Scout troop leader, children were in school, and did all the other things mothers do, she wondered if she did enough.

"I could have always given more care to the children. Empty nesters like me sometimes question if they gave enough of themselves to their children while they were growing up," she said in response to her open-ended reflection. "Now, I use all of my experience in motherhood, work and management, when I minister in prison. These are grown men and women who have made mistakes and are suffering greatly."

In sharing these remarks about actionable faithfulness, she felt it was also key to emphasize that it's important to listen and not force our faith on others.

As those in attendance listened to her remarks, one attendee spoke up and shared, "I struggle with defining faith in my life." Sister said, "Faith often seems illogical, and requires us to suspend our reliance on logic."

Sister indicated that this definition of faith, and more, are in the book she's written – *Finding Freedom in God's Illogical Ways* – that is on a path to be published.

"The publisher has five authors he's working with," she explained to give an idea of when the book will be published, and that it will take time to get published. "I'll be narrating the audio book myself as the publisher said that the best audio books are narrated by the authors themselves."

Having now entered into a dialogue with those in attendance, Sister next responded to a question posed by another attendee who was interested in knowing what her prayer resources were.

"When we make our vows, we commit to pray the Divine Office every day," she responded. "Another I use daily is the *Magnificat*, and I also pray the Rosary before daily Mass."

Beyond the various resources, Sister stated, "God always has plans for me. If I believe He is asking me to do something and it is a good fruit of the Holy Spirit, then I will do it, and if I have the time and energy." This would include things like being asked to do this talk on Faithfulness, a talk with the Lady's Guild or Catholic schools, conversations with inmates, and my work with St. Vincent de Paul Georgia."

All of the things mentioned keep her close to Jesus, and pulls her into deeper encounters, and scenarios she learns from.

Following her response to the first question, Sister was then asked by an attendee who works in a corporate setting if she could share some advice for engaging with a co-worker who is a self-proclaimed atheist.

"Yes," Sister answered. "When I announced I would be a Sister, my eldest son (now 44) said he's atheist. When he told me this, these words from the Holy Spirit came to me to say:

1. 'Our bodies were designed with a brain. The brain's designed to seek answers. We're inquisitive.'
2. 'Because of that, we'll never have all the answers.'
3. 'No one can say there's no God, because that's a finite statement.'
4. 'It's not possible to be atheist. You're agnostic, not atheist.'"

She went on to comment that those who are atheists are just people who haven't done the work we have to seek and find Him.

"I've often wondered, 'Why am I wanting this more for the person than they want it themselves?' Most people who have strived to prove God does not exist, in fact, learn from their own efforts that he is, in fact real, and does exist."

Sister also advised the person who asked the question to pray about the matter and how she might approach her colleague.

“I wouldn’t start by giving them a book because this can even be offensive to some people who are not open,” Sister added. “If they’re not open, they’re not open. It’s just where they are in their journey. It’s not their time. The best thing you can do is just be you, be the light of Christ, and pray for them that they will find their way to The Cross, and that God will place other spiritually-grounded people around them.”

Following the guidance shared, Sister spoke a bit about her catechizing a death row inmate who was Muslim, and was finally baptized on Feb. 14th this year.

What’s unique about this inmate is that he and one other death row inmate have been pen pals with Sister during the pandemic and continuing to the present time. Now she is able to visit them.

“Also, before the pandemic, I was going to five prison facilities,” explained Sister. “Coming out of the pandemic, the prisons have been very slow to open up again. However, I was given permission to begin ministry at Georgia’s death row beginning in January of 2022.”

“You have to look for the openings that God will give you, always being open to see them, then discerning if you can/should do them.”