



PRAY Life-giving God, we make friends and music, we breathe and laugh because you give us life. Bless our time together. May our faith move mountains and create harmony. Amen

SPIRIT



NATURAL HIGH

By Angie Fischer

Do you believe in God?" Matt asks as he sits next to me before history class.

I look at him to see if he's serious. I mean, I've known Matt for six years and the closest he has ever come to talking about faith was telling a joke about an agnostic dyslexic insomniac who lies awake wondering if there really is a dog. Matt and I talk about trumpet players, jazz albums, and marching configurations: we're band geeks. But I can tell from his eyes that he honestly wants to know.

"Yeah, Matt, I do."

He thinks for a minute, then asks, "Why?"

Class starts before I can answer, so I spend the hour thinking about how to explain my faith. Maybe it's weird, but I think my faith in God has something

to do with music. It's like sometimes when I play my trumpet, I lose track of time. When I know a song really well, I don't have to focus on the notes or fingerings. I just play.

When that happens, I feel like I've unlocked the real music beyond the page of notes. It's like the secret world behind the wardrobe door. It's calming and exciting; it's full of mystery yet everything makes sense. In those moments I know there's something bigger than me, but also in me.

The bell rings for the end of class and Matt looks at me, waiting for an answer.

"Matt, you know how we played that duet at the state contest?"

"Yeah," Matt says, "we nailed it."

"And something was different, like it was more than us playing the notes."

"That was awesome," Matt says, "It was a healthy, natural high."

We both laugh, thinking about Nurse Sonja's yearly don't-do-drugs talk.

Well, to me it's God. When we played, I felt free in a deep way, do you know what I mean? It's like when singers belt out the blues. It's about expression, and great music comes from that. I guess I think that music comes from the soul, and we wouldn't have great music without God."

Matt nods, but says nothing. So I put the burden of proof on him.

"Why not believe that it's an experience of God when we play like that?" The bell rings again, and it is his turn to think until the next class break.

SUNDAY GOSPEL

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

What is faith?

NARRATOR: Jesus' disciples asked him:

DISCIPLES: Increase our faith.

JESUS 1: If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can say to this sycamore tree, "Be uprooted and transplanted into the sea," and it will obey you.



JESUS 2: If one of you has a servant who comes in from plowing or herding sheep, what will you say?

MASTER: Come, sit down, and take your place at the table.

JESUS 1: No, this is what you will say.

MASTER: Prepare my dinner. Tie up your tunic and serve me while I eat

and drink. You can eat and drink afterwards.

JESUS 2: Should the master feel grateful to the servant who was only doing the expected work? So it is with you. When you have done all the things you have been commanded to do, say, "We are useless servants. We have only done our duty."

Luke 17.5-10

Keeping Faith

By Sara Schulte

I have prayed to do well on math tests I didn't study for, promising to be an excellent student in the future and live up to my full mathematical potential.

Sometimes I have scraped together enough good guesses to answer my prayer. Sometimes I have really regretted not studying.

I have often driven too fast to school, praying and promising God all the way that if I get to school without a wreck or a speeding ticket, I will never be late again.

In Sunday's gospel Jesus' friends seem to seek special powers like those I have prayed for—power to get A's without studying and to speed without paying. They ask for an increase in their faith.

Jesus insists that faith does not come in medium, large, and extra large. In fact, he seems to poke fun at his apostles when he describes what faith the size of a tiny mustard seed can do. Perhaps he suspects they want to do wonders and show off. "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can say to this sycamore tree, 'Be uprooted and transplanted into the sea,' and it will obey you."

Why would anyone want to transplant a sycamore tree into the sea? Such an act might dazzle spectators, but what is the point? The tree won't survive. What kind of faith throws big shade trees into the sea?

If faith is a gift that gives us power over things, then of course we want more of it. We might want to be like the master in the gospel, who orders his servant around instead of ordering trees into the sea.

But our faith isn't about having power over trees or people. Faith moves us, not trees, or servants, or math grades.

For example, suppose I am about to try rock climbing for the first time. If I don't trust my teacher, I won't move off the ground. If I trust the teacher, I begin to climb. Neither the rope nor the rock changes. I have no magical control over things around me. My faith in my teacher changes me.

Faith changes us because it is about relationship. Babies learn to trust their parents because moms and dads return again

and again to feed and change them. Babies live and grow because of their parents' care without knowing it.

Before I have words to describe it, I have a relationship with God. I find the world into which I am born trustworthy. All of us live, breathe, and enjoy the world. As we grow, we raise questions about where we come from and where we are going. We recognize that the world is good, and we sense we are not alone in it. Someone sustains us. God is with us.



Sometimes tragedies like disease, earthquakes, accidents, hurricanes, or wildfires happen through no one's choice or action. What does faith mean when things go wrong, whether from our own choices or simply the way things happen?

Wouldn't the world work better if faith meant we had power over circumstances to change them when we mess it up or when it just goes wrong? Faith doesn't give us super powers; it gives us relationships.

God doesn't stop loving us when we are angry or suffering. We live in a deep, underlying relationship with God that connects us even when we don't feel it. The Church calls this the faith by which we believe, a total adherence to God whom creation and Jesus reveal as good and loving.

Faith also means what we believe—the content. What we believe grows and changes as we develop more capacity to express our relationship with God and to understand our Christian traditions.

Our relationship with God moves us to work for justice and to build up community with others. But it isn't just for show.

QUESTIONS 1 When and how have you experienced being part of something bigger than yourself? 2 How is expressing one's inner spirit also an experience of God? 3 How is your relationship with God like the author's in Keeping Faith? 4 What is an experience that has tested your faith? 5 Why is even a little faith enough? 6 What are the everyday duties of Christians?



At an annual grandparents Mass high school students share faith across generations.

OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

Faith has two meanings.

To believe can mean both to trust and to test. The word in Latin for *I believe* is *credo*, which combines two root words—*cor* (heart) and *do* (give). In its first meaning to believe is to give my heart, to trust.

In saying, "I believe," Christians express their trust in God as the ultimate source of their being. We give our hearts to God in an act of our whole selves, a commitment to this deep and sustaining relationship. We trust God holds us in being. To believe, first of all, is to believe and trust God, to belong to God.

In the 1600s a second meaning of the word *believe* developed. People began to use their minds to test and question what we can say about God. To believe acquired a second meaning—to hold an opinion or theory. Saying *I believe* is stating an opinion that others may question and doubt.

Commonly today, *to believe* has this second meaning—to *accept something*

as true or real, to think or suppose. I suppose the bus will come on time as usual. I believe the cosmos has evolved over 13.7 billion years.

To believe for a Christian involves both trusting one's heart to God and testing the doctrines and traditions Christians hold. Perhaps when people say, "I'm spiritual but not religious," they mean they trust and respond to their relationship with God but haven't come to understand the doctrines and traditions of their Church.

Christianity has two main credos that express what Christians believe—the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed. In both creeds Christians proclaim that God creates all that is, becomes one of us in Jesus, and moves within us in the Spirit toward holiness and wholeness.

In Sunday's gospel Jesus insists that faith in him is powerful. In each Sunday gospel we see in Jesus who we are and who we can become.

Faith is a personal act—the free response of the human person to God's self-revelation in creation, in Israel, in Jesus. Faith is also what we believe; for example, Jesus is truly God and truly human.

What do you believe?

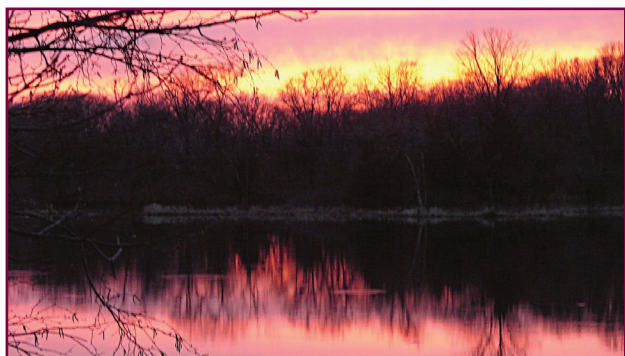
Growing from childhood to adulthood requires using new brainpower to understand the religious traditions we inherit from earlier generations. We ask questions and try to express our experience of

the mystery of God in our lives.

To create a creed, circle or highlight the statements of faith below that most express what you believe and how you relate to God. You can use these statements from teens, or

write statements of your own. Then choose 20 statements to comprise your own creed. Write them on a piece of paper.

I believe GOD creates the world... leads humankind with freedom and love rather than force...causes evil and suffering...allows humanity to cause evil and suffering...cares about me and my life...looks like a human being...is a parent who tells me what to do all the time...is the same God as in other religions...is a friend...will forgive anything...is okay with me questioning...will help me choose my path in life...answers prayers...has a master plan for every person...God is real...like breath, gives me life



I believe in life after death...hell... miracles...a world without prejudice based on a person's status, race, age, or sex...peace...asking for help during tough times...true love...guardian angels...making decisions that are right, even if they are not easy...being open to new people and ideas...setting goals...never giving up...living in the present and trying not to worry about the future... smiling, laughing, and having fun...trustworthiness and healthy relationships following Jesus' way of love...putting others before myself...me

I believe that a strong work ethic will take me where I want to go...everything happens for a reason ...faith is a process...marriage is a bond that should not be broken...we can all do some good in the world...we should help out the less fortunate... every life is precious and should be respected... it's important to do what I love...it is important to stand up for myself and my beliefs...praying makes a difference...good things and bad things happen to all people...we make mistakes in order to learn from them...everything in the bible did happen...I should go to church on Sunday...everyone deserves a second chance...I was created for a reason...Jesus is truly human and truly divine...the Holy Spirit acts in each of us.

I believe every person

deserves an education...has a story...has some sort of unique ability...has good in them...has evil in them... deserves respect.

FAITH in ACTION

1 Identify an action that

flows from one or more of the faith statements. For example, if you believe prayer can change the world, pray more. If you believe in helping people in need, work with a justice-seeking organization. Make this a year to turn believing into acting.

2 Create a concluding prayer; give each group member a small circle of paper, symbolizing a mustard seed. Each writes on the "seed" one way believing in Jesus shapes his or her life. Form a prayer circle; place the mustard seeds in a bowl. Pass the bowl and have each person read one of the statements. Keep the statements to use again.