

Why we are not Cows.

What is boredom and who is affected by it? There is any number of ways to describe boredom. Boredom is something only human's experience. The cow is quite content being a cow and never thinks otherwise, because it is not capable of reason. It has a brain no bigger than a medium size potato. It knows when it's hungry and eats, it knows when it's tired and sleeps. It cannot worry. It reacts to pain by running from it without the slightest understanding why. Like all animals the cow doesn't know it exists.

Humans do. We exist, we think about it and there are times when we wonder why. What is meant by existential questions? Or question about existence. How does existential boredom happen? What causes it?

The best answers to these and many other questions related to life and happiness is found in the Christian Religion. The Christian Religion involves one's entire life. It must live in the person's psyche. We think of the psyche as the soul; but it is much more than that. Psyche is a Greek word, the language of the original New Testament. It is a compound word, meaning life, our entire being, our bodies and senses guiding our behavior. In his book, From Humdrum to Holy, Fr. Ed. Broom refers to that which obstructs our progress in deepening our faith in God, as kryptonite, the nemesis of Superman. Kryptonite drained him of his powers, rendering him ineffective:

For Christians, kryptonite represents those hidden things in our lives, that prevents God from working his will in us, blunting spiritual progress.

Christianity is a learning process: how to plan a roadmap to righteousness: that state of being God wants us all to possess; learning how to cultivate virtues or guides to happiness and the way to eternal life; discovering the power of prayer in its many useful forms.

Using the faith experiences of Abraham and Mary, Mother of Christ, we will learn how anyone can build an enduring faith, by keeping it fresh and powerful.

Faith is fidelity, meaning loyalty or devotion to a person or a cause. Faith or fidelity is a response to God in love that grows and flourishes. Saint Therese of Lisieux, the little flower, was often heard saying that "Love has grown in me." She meant the love that derives from a deep and growing relationship with God. Our love for our husbands or wives grows and deepens over time spent with each other. The same is true of our children.

The only adequate response to God's call is to submit our entire self to him: our wills, our thoughts, and our desires; our psyches. It is a response of total awareness. We cannot know or experience God in sound-bites. It is either our whole being or nothing. A faith that truly understands the word: "Amen." In Hebrew, the original language of the Old Testament, Amen means something firm and worthy of confidence.

In Medieval theology the word *credo* or *credere* means "I Believe." It too has further meaning as in the word for heart. Thus, to truly believe in God is to give him your heart; to place it unconditionally in his hands. There can be no love without this understanding. *Mia Corda*: My heart. The *Sursum Corda*: "lift up your hearts."

Faith is not just a word. To possess it requires our reciprocal obedience to God's love for us. We reciprocate his love in kind. God invites us to faith in him. It requires a subjective response. Our

personal feelings developed by a relationship with him. We cannot know faith by an objective understanding which is not influenced by personal feelings. God sets the vision and we respond to that vision. What can be more subjective than the cross?

Consider Abraham: he was directed by God to do what was outrageously unpopular and impractical. He was ordered to sacrifice his son, Isaac on an altar. First, the story is a foretelling of Christ, the Son of the Father who would be sacrificed on the cross. Secondly, it was a test of Abraham's faith. Abraham knew in his heart that he was being tested and that God would bring no harm to his son. Faith is to leave your place of comfort and security and to go into the unknown, a term this world fears. The test of faith confronts one of our most basic instincts: security, which has its roots in self-preservation.

In the early church, for the first three centuries, it was illegal to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. You could lose your life for being a Christian. Among the strategies used to get the new Christians to deny their faith was to appeal to their sense of financial security. In the Book of Job we read that Satan the Tempter assumed that without financial security Job would choose money over God. Without this, Satan believed Job would never be a believer. We see this attitude among people today. It is commonplace. The questions put before people of faith are can your precious God provide you with a job or money? The answer is yes. Psalm 34:10 says: "those who seek the Lord lack nothing good." Paul writing to the Philippians: "My God will provide every need ..." "Do not worry about what to eat or drink or wear, God knows you need these." The words of Christ as recorded in Matthew, Chapter 6:31-32.

Economic power is used by politicians to cause people to need them. Unwed mothers receive 1500 per child every month from the government, including welfare, food stamps and more.

Four children of an unwed mother receives 6,000, per month including welfare and the rest. That's 72,000, per year minus welfare and food stamps. To them, government is god.

The Internal Revenue Service could easily cause Churches to water down their preaching of Gospel truths, by revoking their tax exempt status; and they are looking for ways to do this. Threats, no matter how subtle, of economic sanctions instill fear in people and in business. Money is used to forward political progressivism or radical liberalism. Those who lack faith fall for it – the allure of the dollar is strong. Money is power. Money can become god.

Consider the wisdom of Shakespeare when he wrote in Macbeth: "Security is mortal's chiefest enemy." Temptations to disbelieve because of our insecurities – financial, medical, psychological, and so on – can intimidate, causing fear and doubt.

Cults often promise magical breakthroughs in fame, power and money and it attracts many people, including the young. Powerball can become cultic. I see people in the convenience store up the street spending forty and fifty dollars on lottery tickets and they do not look as if they can afford it. Always be weary of films, commercials and get rich quick schemes that promise cheap popularity and easy success. There is always a price. I remember reading a book about a minister who could not get through to a teenager about faith in God. He refused to believe in God and opted for a satanic cult. He worshipped the Devil. What attracts young people to satanic cults? Power, popularity, fame; they are promised these things. However, these empty promises are used to draw the person in so deep there is no escape. The boy committed suicide – he sliced his wrists. By his body, on the floor, was a book about Devil worship. The price was the boy's life. Within the next twenty four hours, 1500 teenagers will commit suicide in this country. I would wager that none of them attend church, much less, raised in one.

Faith does not promise financial breakthroughs or magical transformation of stone into bread or dry land into ocean. Faith does not promise blessings without effort; it does not assure us of eternal sunshine because life includes nighttime. Take as your example the unshakable, convincing, strong faith of Abraham. His faith is a classic example of the kind of security that assures God's blessed endurance. Faith helps you make it through the night.

Abraham came from Ur the ancient term for Iraq. Paganism was rife in the land. And the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Genesis, 12:1-3.

The Lord appeared to Abram again and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord: 12:7. Again God appeared to Abraham when he was ninety-nine years old, and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Genesis 17:1.

In all of these appearances of God to Abraham he never asks God for anything. He simply obeys; this, from a man who at this point, did not know the true God.

He was like an obedient child following the lead of his heavenly Father. During the course of these visits, many things happened in the life of Abraham that would have made almost any one object to God's call. He endured strife, let downs, doubt and skepticism. This is the faith that comes only through a deep relationship with God where trust replaces doubt and love displaces skepticism.

The same is true of Job who in the face of incredible adversity, said I know my redeemer lives and that I shall see him face to face. Job 19:25.

Mary:

The Gospel of Luke reports that in the sixth month an angel, Gabriel by name, was sent by God to the city of Nazareth, in Galilee, to a young maiden Named Mary or Miriam. She was a virgin and engaged to marry her betrothed named Joseph or Yosef. The angel came to her and said “Hail, full of Grace, the Lord is with you.” He said, “Don’t be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.” Meaning she was not picked from a crop of women at random. She possessed certain qualities: faith, religious devotion and obedience. “You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus ...” and Mary said: “I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” Luke 1:26-31. Handmaid means a female servant. She pondered this. She was troubled and frightened.

Here, we have the mystery of the Annunciation, when a young women’s faith brought about the greatest event in human history; the Incarnation – when God became man to save us from sin and invite us to the richness of God’s love. Here is one more account of the journey of faith. Abraham was the male prototype or first model of faith. Mary, the female prototype of faith because she said the yes by which God became man.

As with Abraham, we see in Mary another form of the lived response to faith; a social aspect of faith. Her life in devotion and thanksgiving to God was not something she held in private. She knew Joseph would not understand when she told him of what had happened to her. In fact, he

contemplated putting her away or getting rid of her, thinking she had slept with a man. But this did not deter her from telling him. She boldly proclaimed she was visited by God.

Eventually and by God's Grace, Joseph came to understand. Faith is an integral part of our Christian life. We must never be afraid to talk about it, no matter how others treat it. Mary became living evidence that with God, nothing is impossible. Today, she is considered the Queen of all Saints and an example of indescribable faith. Faith shapes the way we talk, work and relate to others. If I believe in God others should see it.

The life of faith is seen by others in the way a Christian lives. There are five marks of living faith. Faith-filled living should resonate with joy, peace, grace, gratitude and conviction. Faith should never emit a negative attitude. There is the story of a woman who had an abusive father. She said he was more religious than any man she had ever known. Yet, whenever he came home from work the entire family became tense and nervous. He carried an air of unhappiness all the time. His daughter complained that his presence made her sad and depressed; it was uncomfortable to be around him. "I wonder how I will serve the same God my father serves," she said. Another story tells of a man who entered a shop owned by a Muslim. He looked at many things and realized he could not afford them. He politely thanked the owner and left. Soon after he passed by the shop again and the owner called him in. "I know you didn't buy anything," he said to the man, but your presence brought so much joy, peace and happiness to me which I had never experienced before. He went on to say that his business had increased and improved. "I am a man of faith in God and His Christ," answered the man, "and that is likely why my life has so much joy as to impact yours."

We say in Christianity that we must become Christ-like, meaning to reveal joy and a positive attitude, peace and happiness. This is why throngs of people followed Jesus everywhere he went. They saw in him all of these qualities which attracted them to him. Mary Magdalene was so thankful that Christ had come into her life she washed his feet with her tears of thanksgiving and dried them with her hair. In ancient Palestine this gesture was the sign of ultimate love and respect.

Fr. Emelu had the opportunity to work in a parish in California. He witnessed its tremendous growth within a few short years. While many churches throughout the United States were losing members in great numbers, this church grew every day. He discovered that the reason why the church grew was because of the joy that emanated from the pastor to the people and vice-versa. The foundation of their joy and hospitality was the spirit of gratitude to God. This can only happen in a church whose members have a special and close relationship with Jesus Christ. Their cup had indeed run over with Joy: Psalm 23:5.

Christian faith bears the capacity to heal wounds and divisions. Today there is much division and wounding in this country by selfish, political forces. Nothing could be more opposed to God's Will. Faith in God shatters the walls of division and its facilitating force, hatred. Faith blurs the distinction between cultural barriers. It sees and treats the person as a child of God created in his image. There is an old Jewish saying: when someone is walking down the street, an angel hovers above him and says "Make way for the image of God." We are all created in His image. Christian faith unites, it doesn't divide. Any organization that promotes hate and violence in the name of religion is a false religion and an evil cult; and I am not just speaking of radical Islam.

Faith is lived in total response to God's Will, even when it brings about ridicule and ostracism. We should never be afraid of this. God is bigger than all of them. Mary was a young maiden who conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and managed a pregnancy that she, before the Annunciation, never would have thought it would be her calling. And yet, she lived this difficult and frightening life with courage and grace. The entire town scorned her.

She left her comfort zone and answered God's call in spite of what she would have to confront. She was not thinking of becoming a mother much less the Mother of Jesus Christ. Any average young woman would see this as too impossible. But because she obeyed, as Luke reports in his gospel narrative: "all generations shall call her blessed." Luke 1:48.

This is the faith that brings about transformation; the faith that rises above the pettiness of a silly world; the faith that knows God by experience and deep conviction.

