REMEMBER TO ADD: For the intention assigned to this Mass, for all the intentions written in the Mass intention binder, and for our personal Mass intentions, which we now OFFER in the silence of our hearts... let us pray to the Lord

In the book Made for Mission that parish leaders are reading, there are some statistics about Faith that might lead some people to become hopeless or discouraged or worried about the future of the Church and of our country. Tim writes that "the United States just passed a **critical threshold** this year, with the "nones," [SPELL IT] or those who claim no religious affiliation at all, surpassing Catholics and evangelicals as the largest religious group in the United States." In other words, the largest religious group are people with no religion!

Tim goes on, "In the... **1970s, only about 5 percent of the U.S. population called themselves "nones."...** the number has shot up to over **23 percent** in the United States. In a country of around 325 million people, that means about **75 million** of them no longer claim a religious affiliation." He concludes, "For the Church, this means that **renewal — both at the highest level and in every parish — is not just a nice idea; it is imperative**. What we need is a new apostolic age."

But more than just religious faith is declining. More and more people are losing faith in **medical science, in politicians, in institutions**, etc. etc.

Jesus calls us, his disciples, the **Light of the World** and the **Salt of the Earth**. We are meant to be the LIGHT of Christ to others, and give the FLAVOR of Faith to others. How can we as disciples not only KEEP shining, but SHINE EVEN BRIGHTER, as many people, even our neighbors, leave the Faith they were raised in? How can we draw others to Christ? 1. By Remembering God's faithfulness, AND, 2. by sharing with others how God has been faithful to us.

Today's reading from Hebrews helps us to **remember God's faithfulness**. **The Old Testament Scriptures** remind us of God's faithfulness to Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Jacob, and many others. **The New Testament Scriptures** remind us of God's faithfulness to Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, to the **first disciples** of Christ. <u>Remembering God's faithfulness in Scripture, helps us to grow in our own personal faith and trust in God.</u>

The author says over and over these words, "By Faith, so and so did such and such." What does it mean to have Faith? It means more than just BELIEVING in facts. It means TRUSTING in a person, and then ACTING on that TRUST.

I read through the Hebrews reading again and I replaced the word "faith" with "TRUST IN GOD", and it helps us to see that Faith is TRUST in God, Trust in God's Faithfulness.

"By TRUST IN GOD Abraham obeyed when he was called to go" to the promised land;

"By TRUST IN GOD Abraham... offered up Isaac... reasoned that God was able to raise even from the dead..." etc.

SO Remembering God's faithfulness in Scripture helps us to grow in faith and trust. Besides learning about God's faithfulness to people in Scripture, we have the incredible record of God's faithfulness to the saints. **The lives of the saints** remind us of God's faithfulness to **His beloved children** over the past 2000 years.

But MOST importantly, we need to remember God's faithfulness to His own Son, Jesus Christ. God the Father answered Jesus' prayers. God rescued Jesus from death by raising Him from the dead! Remembering God's faithfulness to Jesus can help us to endure our own suffering in a way that makes it **meaningful and redemptive**. I recently had a conversation with someone, who is carrying the big cross of serious physical pain. She can't even come to church without taking powerful pain medications. She told me her husband also suffers serious pain. I said, that's a heavy cross to carry! She told me, we are blessed to have the ability to unite our sufferings to the cross of Jesus, to suffer with him, since without Him, our suffering would be meaningless. **SO... by remembering God's Faithfulness to Christ, that God made HIS suffering meaningful and redemptive, she is able to make her own suffering meaningful and redemptive.**

Also, we grow in Faith and Trust in God not only by remembering God's faithfulness to OTHERS, but also by remembering His Faithfulness in OUR OWN LIVES. To remember all the ways God has been faithful to us: everything God has done in our lives up to this moment, beginning with giving us existence, bringing us to birth, adopting us as His beloved son or daughter, loving us through many people, leading us to surrender our lives to Christ and put Him at the center, healing us physically by giving us an amazing body that heals itself, helping us spiritually to overcome sinful habits, being Faithful to us in a million ways... up to this moment.

In the seminary, during finals week I'd usually be cramming for tough exams, and get really anxious about them. There was so much to try to memorize and to learn. But each time, I would go to the tabernacle, and I would remember God's faithfulness to me in the past, how he helped me to pass previous exams. I would pray over and over, "Jesus I trust in you." This would slowly DECREASE my anxiety, and INCREASE my TRUST IN GOD to help me! And He was always faithful.

So we increase our FAITH and TRUST in God by remembering his faithfulness to the people in Scripture, to the saints, to Christ, and to ourselves.

One of the best ways to GROW in faith is to share how God has been faithful to you. This week, pray every day for a "divine appointment," a chance to share with someone How God has helped you, or answered your prayer, or given you peace, or hope, or joy. As you share, BOTH YOU, AND the person you share with, will grow in Faith and Trust in our God.

Announce: In Matthew 25, we hear that Jesus will say to some people, "I was naked, and you clothed me." People are needed to help make clothing for poor children in Haiti. People are invited to sew, or to iron, clothing for these children. You can come to the parish center anytime during office hours or contact Diane Smalley if you want to learn more. ***Birthdays, etc.