

Why I Don't Monopolize Faith (And Neither Should You)

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Virtue Essay

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Dedicated to my family (friends included, you know who you are, and you ARE family, always will be)....I love you, I love you, I LOVE YOU....I will never apologize for sounding like a broken record.

I loathe being told to “keep the faith.” From my very first tango with adversity, that retort, flung around ad nauseam, seemed selfish and downright nonsensical. Faith is certainly not tangible, and will not find its way on one’s mantelpiece. By definition, faith is initiated by the enduring subject. The thought of “keeping” it conflicts with my upbringing, where sharing was always the simplest act of caring. Initiating faith should not necessarily mean claiming ownership over it. To say I am advocating for the complete cessation of the term would in fact disavow my entire argument is to why I do not personally attribute this term now to overcoming grave struggles. Reveling in faith has pulled me from the brink of utter collapse an incomprehensible number of times, and has had a progressive effect on those I hold near and dear. Still, you cannot KEEP it. Rather, the virtue is fluid, and the most constant inconsistency there is. The capability of perennial accomplishment, defying all odds, can only be mastered upon acceptance of faith’s universality. It is perhaps the most tactful of virtues, so long as one never loses sight of their ultimate aims.

Faith, by definition, is an “inner attitude,” and relates “human beings to a supreme God or ultimate salvation” (“Faith,” 2017). A religious upbringing is not a requisite of belief in faith, thus removing a fundamental limiter that would decry secularists and atheists alike. The interpretation of faith in modernity seems to be a symptom of a larger disconnect with the outside world in terms of emotional, fiscal and physical well-being, which I am far too familiar with. The United States has been categorized by those in the theological realm, such as D. Elton Trueblood, as a “cut flower civilization” for transitioning away from its pinnacle Christian roots. A cut flower will “hold its beauty for a time,” but then eventually “wither and die,” instigating the robotic process of merely cultivating another youthful flower for showcasing, and going through the motions of life thereafter (Mohler 1). The “wash-rinse-repeat” attitude towards faith depletes any emotional connotations that one would perceive to be associated with the act. Regardless of specifics, there seems to be a collective expectation that adversity can be vanquished, no matter its frequency of reoccurrence. When it doesn't (a bitter pill to swallow), there comes the disenfranchisement with having faith, and a total rejection of all “feel-good” tactics. Some will continue to wilt away, hollowing faith in the process. We need to have the realization that the questioning of faith is a common struggle, and not one isolated to particular events. This does not trivialize personal pains, but rather bolsters benevolence for what is possessed without any difficulty.

A plethora of phrases have been flung my way (an assault on recollection of misfortunes) from as blasé as “it will be okay” to as sharp-tongued as “get over yourself.” Being a peacekeeper has put me in the crosshairs of physical confrontation. This time last year, relationships that I had hailed for almost two decades were finally been exposed as emotionally abusive associations of convenience. I have attempted to conceal my inward woes, to alleviate

constant emotional turmoil perpetuated upon my two closest friends. On top of this, constant financial uncertainty that has plagued my family since my inception allots for pandemonium towards “minor” inconveniences. Inconveniences that have remained static for decades have taken their toll on my family, and have left imprints on my subconscious that I would not wish on those who betrayed me last year. Even when I am partaking in one of my typical “mental detoxing” exercises, such as walking around my literal “one-horse town” with Beatles or Guns N’ Roses blaring through my terribly tangled earbuds, I am afflicted with randomized flashbacks to moments of utter disdain. Hovering around the battered computer desk at eight years old, devouring sleeves of saltine crackers with specks of off-brand grape jelly for breakfast, lunch and dinner since the cabinets were bone-chillingly barren. One Christmas, in a fit of rage from being unable to get any of us even a commemorative trinket, my brothers and I had to seek refuge with our downstairs neighbor, as my father took out his pent-up aggression and downright disappointment on our artificial Christmas tree. The shards of glass on the stained carpeting and cracks in our family heirlooms (which were more Target than Tiffany’s) represented the fracture in our family, and our exhaustion from continual financial desolation. Even the frequented childhood escape that was my Nana’s house in Jackson Heights fell victim to the pains of existence, as illness halted all improvements to the dilapidated residence. I will every so often look up the address on Google Maps, and pain myself with the staunch reality each time that another family now resides there, and was able to modernize it to the standards my family had only been capable of envisioning. Now, as a “fully-functioning adult,” I have turned to food, libation and vinyl. I find myself spending obscene amounts of money on coffee trips, Uber rides to Barnes & Noble for perusing of their record section, or pre-COVID solo jaunts to bar for after-work glasses of Blue Moon and dirt-cheap garlic parmesan wings. Whenever my friends are

unavailable, who are few and far between these days, I will coax myself with the tangible, in avoidance of my dysfunctional “four walls,” as long as humanly possible. Lately, I find myself staring at the ceiling right before bed, finally falling asleep at the crack of dawn, and getting up once everyone else is about to recline from their daily activities, with no motivation to partake in my own.

Alas, I exude faith. Much like Paul McCartney in “Let It Be,” amongst “times of trouble,” the image of Mother Mary emerges breathtakingly. While for Sir Paul it may have been his deceased mother, for me, it is a culmination of several positives flourishing amongst the proverbial rubble. It is my teeny-tiny nephew giggling up a storm while I prance around with green-tinted Ray Bans and wrinkled Ralph Lauren overcoat on. It is his mother, whose friendship was the only genuine relationship manufactured from years of part-time employment at our local hardware store, possessing a knack of deciphering my ups and downs, and her family that keeps their doors always wide open for me. It is my college buddy who reminisces with me about the “good old days” of undergrad at three in the morning over, and the peculiar cast of characters we have both come to know and love. It is my youngest brother and I conversing about our affinity of the rock music of yesteryears, which is a major accolade for someone who just shy of sixteen. It is my other brother constantly depleting his checking account, ensuring we all can have a home-cooked meal or some greasy-yet-mouthwatering fast food as the cabinets clang louder from their lack of substantial content. It is my mother and her random texts, saying “I love with” with a smorgasbord of colorful heart emojis. It is my dad, a man who has gone through the ringer and self-identified proponent of “doom and gloom,” coming up to me while typing diatribes for your textbook “bear hug.”

It cannot wholly assert the good outweighing the bad, and I tend to think these sides of the sliding spectrum are now neck-and-neck. The good does not have to dominate the bad, in order to popularize faith. Faith is all around us, for every one of us, and does not discriminate based on demographics. Make no mistake, it would be absolute perfection if clamoring the faith was the cure-all for all the world's issues. However, perfection is debunked consistently, and thus we must learn to cherish even the seemingly inconsequential. Staying faithful will not change my situation today, or tomorrow, or perhaps twenty years down the line. It might not cease my existential woes of passion and purpose that keep my eyes glued to the ceiling, and hands to cups of sickeningly overpriced beverages laced with artificial sweeteners and preservatives. What it does, so well, is keep me from going off course completely. It serves as a reminder of the people who are my life, and who will never be able to grasp their distinctive value. It raises awareness of those who I know are much less fortunate than loved ones and myself, giving me the drive to aide in the quest of experiencing faith. There are lessons to be learned from all of our experiences, and so long as we don't monopolize our confidence of the prevalence of greatness that is when anyone can truly say nothing at all is aloof. Faith will frolic, and yet, be unforgettably fierce.

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