

Lord, I Believe, Help My Unbelief **Allison Gingras**

Hi, I'm Allison Gingras. And if I had to have a mantra, I think I would probably have chosen, the words from Mark's Gospel. "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief." How many times have you have you perhaps, done the same thing? And you know the truth, you know the teachings of the church, you know what Jesus has said in the Gospels, and there is a part of you that completely believes. And then there's the other part of you that completely doesn't. Or maybe you don't, not believe, but you have moments of wanting more clarity or understanding. And I just think that those words spoken by this centurion were just perfect. "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief."

Needing Moments of Clarity

This is kind of how I enter many of my Lenten times, with the fasting and the prayer and the almsgiving. I want those things, those Tenets of the Faith to strengthen me. My head knows, my heart struggles. My soul embraces, but my eyes long to see. I came to be in prayer while I was preparing for this talk. I think of that long journey, from head to heart when I know things and I see it with my, the eyes of faith, but then there's a part of me that would probably be chastised along those that Jesus said those of you who need signs and wonders. I don't want to be that person. I want to believe with the eyes of faith. I want to just believe without seeing, right, but it's hard. It's hard sometimes. And I would definitely would have been one of those chastised that needing the signs and the wonders. And God has been very good to me in many times, in many ways in my life, he has allowed these little moments that the only thing I have, I can't even put words to the moments. And I hope that you've experienced these things to where God just makes it perfectly clear to you in your heart that he is there. And he loves you in that moment that you feel is so real. You want to just like hold on to those. And I know that they come when I seek and I ask and I knock, sometimes they don't stay there. And that's also a part of the journey of faith is that sometimes in our faith life, we have that dryness of prayer and we have we don't have those constellations or those signs and wonders that we just can, we're called to continue to believe and continue to reach out to God and to Jesus and belief. And that's not always easy.

Trusting in the Lord

And with that belief comes this trust and know, Jeremiah 17:5-10 "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord." And it goes on with this beautiful imagery of his roots being firmly planted and going to a stream. And I thought of like the flower. A flower doesn't rest it continues to grow towards the sun S-U-N but aren't we called to continue to grow towards the son S-O-N ?

And then these roots get firmly planted. And they seep themselves in the deep living water of the earth. Like they grow and they grow deeper. And the stronger, some of the roots of a plant or a tree are, the sturdier that plant that tree or that flower is. Then it is really hard for the wind or for drought or heat or wind to really destroy it.

And that's the kind of faith that I want. And there's days I do have that faith. And there's other days where I have to kind of continue to work on it. I want that faith that is so deeply rooted in the living water of God, of Jesus, that it's not shaken by drought of prayer. It is not destroyed under the heat of believing in a world that sometimes doesn't want to hear where we have to, what we're believing. They don't want to, you're constantly, perhaps in your life up against opposition to what you believe.

Are You Firmly Rooted in Christ?

I remember a few years ago, my then sister-in-law and I were sitting across from each other at a family function, an anniversary party. And we had all the boys, we have a plethora of boys in our family. At that time, they were about teenage age, and they had all kind of started working in different retail places. And we were laughing about we could go here to get, a lawnmower, we could go there to get toilet paper. We know whatever you needed. Each kid kind of had it covered. And I went to say something.

And at that time, I had just kind of began Catholic ministry as a full-time, blessed to be in full-time Catholic ministry. And just as I went to speak, out of nowhere my sister-in-law's hand went up in my face and she said, "I don't want what you're selling." And it just, it startled me kind of struck me in my place. It was that heat that had I not been working to build those strong roots at that time, to be constantly taking from the living stream, the living water, it would've caused a great riff between us maybe some unforgiveness. It hurt, it stung, but I knew that it was her brokenness and her hurt that those words came from. And I didn't take them personally, fact I prayed for her then, and I continue to pray for her now. That is what that living with those strong roots of faith can look like in somebody's life.

Ideas on How You Can Be Rooted in Christ

So, are we firmly rooted in Christ? Are you firmly rooted in Christ? And if you're not, how do we do that? I mean, I said that I have these days where I am, and I'm not. And so, we continually need to be rooted and draw from our faith. And so how do we do that? And it really is to build a strong root system of faith, it is daily.

And so just a couple of ideas I wanted to share with you. I put it on my calendar, coffee with Christ. I try to do that at least once a week to make this very purposeful time of sitting with nice cup of coffee or tea, my scriptures, a spiritual reading, a notebook, and just sitting quietly with God, with Jesus, because the world can be very noisy. And I'm really good at talking. Clearly, I talk all the time, but it is when I am quiet that I'm the most receptive to what Jesus has to say to me.

The other thing is to join with others. You don't have to do this alone. You're not in this alone. So, to find time to be with others and study, prayer group, book club, just different ways activities at your parish whatever you can find that helps you be connected, I highly recommend that. Variety is the spice of faith. Okay, it's the spice of life.

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But looking at various devotions is also another way to kind of help you discover how you best dip into that water, into that source, that living source of faith that God has for each and every one of us, there are so many devotions. And when I first came back to the faith, I knew the rosary, I did not know about the scapular, I didn't know about all the different chaplets, I didn't know about divine mercy. There's the Little Crown of the Blessed Mother. There's so many beautiful, the sacred heart, so many beautiful devotions, and each one has prayers and different ways that we can interact with God and grow our faith.

So, I highly recommend doing some research, finding some different devotions, and not do them all at once. That will be overwhelming. Don't overwhelm yourself. Lent is a great time to try one new devotion or two. Try one each day, each week, each day, try not to get yourself stuck into the "how I should", or "this is the way".

I love St. James that says in the scripture, as he says, *"If anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask."* So, if you're not sure of if you're doing you, can't, first of all, you cannot pray wrong, but if you need some guidance the Holy spirit is there to guide you. So, if you lack wisdom, ask, do some good research, look for different devotions and give them a try. And don't worry if you don't like it, or if you do it for a couple of days or a week or a month and you want to try something different, that's okay, too. As long as you keep talking to God and keep staying connected, these are good, good things.

One of the ways I came back to the faith it was life-changing, and I'm sure since you're here at the Pray More Novenas Retreat, Lenten Retreat that you too were drawn in some way to your faith through novenas. A 54-day rosary novena was very much a life-changing experience for me. So, it was Our Lady Undoer of Knots. And I wish I could remember which was the first novena I did with Pray More Novenas. One day I'm going to have to search back through my emails and see if I could find it. It may have been the St. Anne Novena which I did not pray for myself, but I prayed for many different women in my life who at that time were looking for love, for peace in their situation, for vocation. And I remember taking all their names and writing them down in my journal. It was one of, definitely one of the first ones I prayed with Pray More Novenas. It's such a beautiful prayer, the St. Ann Novena.

So just to recap, put time with Jesus on your calendar, call it whatever you want, coffee with Christ, just morning prayer. We should, obviously we need to pray every single day. Some people are very good at praying first thing in the morning, other people are good at night. My husband is a deacon, so he prays the hinge prayers of the liturgy of the hours which I have tried to do with him, not one of the devotions that really speaks to me in a way that I can make it part of my routine. But I absolutely love when we make time to do it together. And lent again is a beautiful time to try doing the Liturgy of the Hours if you're not sure how to do them, they can look complicated if you go in by the book. But if you look online, you can do them online. Ask your pastor, he can absolutely help you if this is something that you're interested in, this might be where you join with others. Start a little group, come together with others to learn how to pray the Liturgy of the Hours. Then of course, trying different devotions and novenas.

A Scripture from Luke

Another scripture I wanted to share with you was Luke 16:19-31. This is the rich man and Lazarus. And the scripture from that, that really jumps out the line, that really kind of grabs my heart is Lazarus is saying, "Let me go and tell, please warn my brothers, you go tell them like don't let them fall." The rich man says to Lazarus, excuse me. The rich man is saying, "Please warn my brothers, warn people that they have to believe because this pain, the suffering, the chasm between me and heaven is just too much." And the words like that just chill me to the bone are "*They would not be persuaded,*" even if somebody raises from the dead. And I thought about the time of Jesus himself rising from the dead.

The Hostile Witnesses

And there were many witnesses to what had happened. And we kind of, we call them for lack of a better word hostile witnesses. They did not want to approve Jesus was truly the son of God. They did not want to approve to others that He had resurrected, that He had fulfilled the Messiah prophecies. Yet they could not deny what their eyes were seeing, they're witness, they're authentic testimony to what was happening, for me when I started to read these and discover them and realize that there were people who were testifying to the truth of Jesus Christ who didn't really want to do that. Like the Centurion at the foot of the cross, right? When he sees Jesus die, like his testimony like this is a man who did not want to believe this. He did not want to have that to be part of the teaching others, right? He didn't want to be part of that. But yet he is because when you see the truth, when you see something happening and you convey it that's just what happens, right. Witnesses, that's what they do.

And it reminded me that this like there's parts of history that I don't, that I wasn't there. I don't doubt it. Eyewitness accounts, I take these for what they are. I believe them. I study them. I make them part of my own belief system, of the creation of my country, my family, my government, different things, right? We just take these historical figures in our life. We don't doubt. But yet we do this with our faith. And I always wondered why I did that. I did it a lot when I was younger and still trying to get to kind of grow in my faith. I definitely doubted many things, but building faith through daily encounters with grace, through prayer, sacrament and scripture, I call it the grace trifacta. This is what helped me put aside my doubts to be more of the person who believes and needs little less help with their unbelief is this daily encounter with Christ. And when you encounter Jesus, you're never the same again.

So, we have this daily encounter with Christ through prayer, sacrament and scripture. And through our good deeds and through the people we meet and through spiritual reading, there's so many different ways we can have these beautiful encounters with Christ, but if you remember nothing else, that prayer, sacrament and scripture, that grace trifacta that's a great place to start and to build your grace, well build where you dip into that living water of faith.

A Blessing to Accountability

And maybe we'll end with this, maybe it's accountability that you need. I know I did. I would go to a great retreat or read a great book or even hear a homily and leave church and be on fire for about 10 minutes then come home from the retreat, I spend about two days on retreat high and then I was back to my old way of thinking and doing and forgetting to put God in my life. And so, I needed accountability. And so, one of the things the suggestions I gave was to start a group or to be part of a group during advent last year when I was home a lot and I had a lot of time more time than usual because I wasn't traveling for work.

I decided to take advantage of all the different virtual Bible studies and book clubs that were out there. I started one of my own with women from my church. I joined one that had been started for deacon's wives. And then I just had two girlfriends who just wanted to read kind of a little heavier scripture, sorry spiritual reading together. So, the three of us would meet 7:30 Thursday mornings. Still doing that. And it was these beautiful ways of accountability. I know my weaknesses; I know my faults. I know that left to my own devices, I may not get through that book. I may not spend that time in prayer. I may not read those scriptures, but when I know that there's others who are also on that journey with me, maybe still struggling as well.

But I know that I'm accountable to them for being part of the group. It just, for me, it helped me to stay focused. So, if that's something that you might find helps you, blesses you, then I highly recommend it starting your own or finding one to join. And it's not as scary as you think, starting your own group. Small group literally can be one other person, two other people, and you can let it grow from there as your comfort level grows. But there's definitely a blessing to accountability for sure.

Well, I pray that for you that you also pray for that wisdom that to know what God is calling you to for your faith. What is going to help grow your faith and help you stay connected with God, not just during this Lenten time but every day and letting it grow and grow overtime. I'm Allison Gingras. And I'm going to pray for you, that Lord we believe, please help our unbelief.