**FROM THE PASTOR**

My dear brothers and sisters,

Saint Paul tells us today, in the letter to the Ephesians, that “by grace you have been saved through faith” (Eph 2:8). Grace means “gift”. All that we have is gift from God, and we are called to recognize, and be grateful for that gift of life, the gift of being God’s sons and daughters, the gift of the promise of eternal life. St. Paul also mentions faith. We hear in the Gospel, “everyone who believes in him [Jesus] might not perish   
but might have eternal life” (John 3:16). What does this belief mean? What is this faith about which Jesus and St. Paul speak?

Sometimes we think that faith is thinking (maybe thinking strongly) that something we can’t see exists. Faith is more than that, though. Faith means that I build my life on this belief, I trust the one in whom I believe. If I think God exists, but it doesn’t change how I act, speak, or the way I think, it is not faith. **Faith means that I live in such a way that my life makes no sense if God *doesn’t* exist**!

Think about the hateful acts we’ve heard about with Christians being kidnapped and slaughtered for their Faith. The martyrs of our time (and of so many past generations, too), had such a strong belief that they would rather be tortured and die than to renounce their belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and God. Do we think this much about our Faith in Jesus, or is our Faith just an extra thing in our lives (maybe even a burden) that we do so we can get to heaven? Or to put it another way, if ISIS were to come to your door, would they be able to tell by the way you live that you are a Catholic? Is there evidence by your actions, by how you spend your free time, by what you watch and listen to, by how you spend your money, by what you refuse to do on principle, by how and how often you speak about Jesus and God? Something to think about.

Jesus says that those who believe in Him have eternal life. He didn’t say that all of the people who believe wouldn’t have to worry about suffering or persecution. Quite to the contrary, He tells us that we will be persecuted just like Him, that many will be killed for following Him, and that we are to take up our crosses every day and follow Him. He promises, though, that He will be with those who are faithful to Him, and give them strength to endure what comes. He promises that this world is not the end; there is *more*. There is the eternal joy of being in the arms of Love Himself! Do we *really* believe this? Do our lives show this?

This is why prayer is so vital. Let’s be honest, none of us know how we would react to a terrorist until the terror should come. Our courage (much like the disciples’ when Jesus is arrested) can fade swiftly when met with real danger. Our prayer, though, is our relationship with God. As we spend time with Him, He strengthens us, purifies us, and prepares us for whatever hardship we will experience (and we *all* experience hardships!). The closer we get to God in prayer, the more open we will be to all that Jesus, our God, is doing in our lives to get us ready for what comes next.

Let us pray that God will strengthen our faith so that we may live lives worthy of Him in this world, and share eternal life in the next.