

What is Faith?

One Writer's Answer

The Cloak, March 2024

I subscribe to [The Christian Century](#) and look forward to the monthly arrival of each new issue. This becomes my usual breakfast table spiritual reading each day of the month. Usually there's a primary theme that the issue deals with, but the editor, Peter W. Marty, offers a thought piece at the beginning of each issue.

In the recent February 2024 offering (see photo), I was struck by Marty's take on faith as a lifetime growth and development. So at this beginning of Lent, I offer it to readers of *The Cloak* to ponder as we make our way into our daily spiritual reflection and prayer practices.

In contrast to a “mountaintop” experience or being struck down like Paul on the road to Damascus, Marty insists that our faith — our way of viewing the world and our experience of our own reality in relation to God's Spirit — is a lifetime project built through daily practice in our ordinary lives. He says the following:

Faith is a deeply ingrained condition formed through steady habits, disciplined practices, and reliable instincts that take shape over long stretches of time. It's a way of life that acquires its layers and contours incrementally, developing ever so gradually and often imperceptibly. Somewhat like the parent who doesn't notice her infant's changing appearance until she comes home from a weeklong trip and can't believe how much her child has matured in her absence. The Christian life doesn't emerge overnight any more than friendship does. The internal dispositions that form our character establish themselves often unselfconsciously and over the course of many uneventful days [in our ordinary life].

Well you might have a conversation about Marty's take on faith — with yourself or with another person. And there may very well be other routes into faith like sudden conversions, like witnessing the faith of others, mentoring, etc. But for most of us, I think what he says rings true.

Marty ends his editorial by quoting Hans Kung — a theologian who wrote decades ago — about being a Christian. Kung says “being a Christian is a particularly good thing.” And Marty concludes that “however gradually and unceremoniously faith may evolve within us, it provides a life that can hold and carry us through all kinds of [life] circumstances.” Amen!

Sandi †

(The Rev. Dr. Sandra M. Levy-Achtemeier)

