Faith and Life

Teacher Background

Faith in Jesus
Faith is essentially a living relationship of love and trust between two persons. Central to any faith in Christ is his resurrection. It is with the Risen Lord that we enter a faith relationship. We do not put our faith in the dead! As St Paul puts it: ‘If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.’ By its very nature, Christian faith is a gift from God. We cannot of ourselves enter into communion with the transcendent. It is beyond our reach. Nor can we verify for ourselves absolutely the reality of Christ’s resurrection. It is God who initiates the encounter of faith, who by grace enables us to put our trust in his revelation in Jesus Christ. Faith therefore embraces an acceptance of Christ’s teaching. This implies an intellectual assent to its truth and a living it out in discipleship.

Salvation and Redemption
These are related though distinct theological concepts. Salvation is the ultimate fulfilment of life. It is that final achievement of the purpose of our creation. It implies that finally there will be an end to contingency and to the hazards of existence, such as we experience in sin and death. We will be eternally ‘safe’ or ‘healed’ (Latin: salvare). In Christian thinking, God has always intended our salvation and God alone can provide it. Salvation is to endlessly live in God’s presence, to enjoy the beatific vision. Redemption refers to the means through which we can achieve final salvation. It is God’s saving plan as carried out through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because through sin men and women reject God’s plan for their existence, their salvation is lost and cannot be regained by their own efforts. By becoming one of us, ‘like us in all things but sin’, the Son of God won back salvation for humankind through his obedience to God’s will and his sacrificial death on the cross. He redeemed us from sin and death.

Although salvation refers to our final destiny with God, there is a sense in which we already share in salvation. Through the grace Christ won for us by his death and resurrection, we are by Baptism set free from sin and enjoy a filial relationship with God as we journey towards the ultimate salvation God intends for us.

Eschatology
Eschatology is the doctrine of the ‘last things’. It is concerned with the ultimate destiny of human beings and of the created universe. In traditional Catholic theology it deals with heaven, hell, purgatory, the resurrection of the body, final judgment and the consummation of all things in the Kingdom of God. In the Bible, treatment of these topics is frequently couched in visionary and symbolic language that should not be interpreted literally. Although these topics are dealt with as belonging in the future, there is also an important ‘present’ dimension to them. Because of Christ’s death and resurrection, judgment has already been passed on sin and we, through grace, share already in Christ’s risen life. Meaning is given to death, for it is now a participation in Christ’s Passover to eternal life. God’s kingdom has been inaugurated and all of history is to be interpreted as the record of God’s plan in Christ being mysteriously unfolded.