FAITH AND REASON

KAI: You know, Libby, thanks to science and reason, we know there are about a billion trillion stars in the universe.

LIBBY: And thanks to faith, we have a sense of awe and wonder at our place in all that … even though we can only see seven stars here in L.A. I didn't get a permit.

CATHOLIC CENTRAL OPENING TITLES

KAI: Welcome to Catholic Central. I'm Kai.

LIBBY: And I'm Libby. Today, we're talking about the relationship between faith and reason.

KAI: Now, you might be thinking, "Reason? Even with all the seemingly illogical and irrational things Catholics believe?"

LIBBY: Or that Catholics have to check their brains at the church door.

KAI: Not true, although it's too bad. It would make church committee meetings a lot easier.

LIBBY: The truth is that Catholics love science and reason but believe that we need more answers than what they can give us.

KAI: Since faith and reason both try to connect people to truth, we should first get clear on what we mean by truth.

LIBBY: Catholics believe in objective truth, meaning that truth is a reality that exists independently of whether anyone believes it.

KAI: This is the opposite of moral relativism, the view that multiple contradictory views of right and wrong can all be true at the same time.

LIBBY: Catholics believe that humans have a natural urge to seek the truth. We're curious to figure it out and don't like it when people lie.

KAI: But reason alone isn't enough to figure out everything that's true in the universe.

LIBBY: In fact, virtually every belief system has some element of faith, of trust in something that can't be absolutely proven.

KAI: Even people with no religious beliefs have to trust that any of us actually even have the ability to reason. As G.K. Chesterton says, "Reason is itself a matter of faith. It is an act of faith to assert that our thoughts have any relation to reality at all."

LIBBY: We talk about a few different kinds of truth based on how we figure it out.

KAI: Sometimes we find truth by pure logic.

LIBBY: Like two plus two equals four, or that you can't have a square circle.

KAI: Philosophers call this necessary *or a priori* truth, from the Latin for "from before," because it's possible to figure these things out without going into the world and testing anything.

LIBBY: You could lock a mathematician in a windowless room with nothing but Red Bull, chalk and a blackboard.

KAI: Not that we recommend that.

LIBBY: And theoretically, they could prove all of mathematics all over again from scratch.

KAI: But you would only know they were actually on a crazy caffeine-fueled math bender if you or someone you trusted actually saw them do it.

LIBBY: Right, which would be an example of empirical truth. These are things that you can't just figure out by thinking about them. Instead, it takes observation or experiment. How does this relate to faith and reason?

KAI: We need different kinds of tools for figuring out different kinds of truth. As Pope St. John Paul II put it, "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises in contemplation of truth."

LIBBY: Science is necessary for figuring out how the physical world works.

KAI: But no scientific experiment can tell us our purpose, what it means to live a good life, what happens after we die, or whether there's a God, and what He, she, or it might be like.

LIBBY: Or even whether deliberately killing an innocent person is wrong.

KAI: For that stuff, we need philosophy.

LIBBY: From the Greek for "love of wisdom."

KAI: And theology.

LIBBY: From the Greek, "study of God."

KAI: And faith.

LIBBY: From the ... We figure out moral and philosophical truth by a combination of *a priori* thinking, life experience, and reflections on human nature written by wise people.

KAI: And yes, we mean figure out, not just take God's word for.

LIBBY: You can read about God in the Bible.

KAI: You can observe the natural world He created to get to know more about Him.

LIBBY: And you can also make philosophical arguments for an eternal, transcendent creator, who is the first cause of all things.

KAI: But Catholics also recognize that some ideas are so huge that we, as humans, can't fully wrap our minds around them.

LIBBY: How long is eternity? What does it mean for God to become human? Can God make a YouTube video so boring, even He can't sit through it?

KAI: Don't worry. We're not trying to test that out.

LIBBY: When reason and philosophy come up just a little short, it takes a certain leap of faith, realizing that we can't know something fully, coming to accept that uncertainty, and eventually embracing it.

KAI: Catholics recognize that some things remain mysteries beyond our ability to fully understand, and we trust in God to guide us, through scripture and the Church.

LIBBY: This isn't just about religion, though. All the biggest things we as humans do take a leap of faith.

KAI: When you marry someone, have a child, or choose life as a priest or nun, you're signing up for a commitment far beyond what you can imagine on your own.

LIBBY: Catholics believe that, when we take that leap of faith and trust God, God helps us along the way.

KAI: But we should be clear. Although Catholicism at its best promotes a healthy cooperation between faith and reason, not everyone lives that out perfectly.

LIBBY: Superstition is where people use faith when it's not the right tool for finding truth, like believing you got sick because you didn't comment "Amen" on your aunt's Facebook post about Jesus.

KAI: It's probably because of an ancient curse.

LIBBY: It's also superstition to focus on a precise form of religious practice, instead of interior disposition -- basically, what's in your heart.

KAI: If you say 100 prayers, but you don't mean them, just saying the words won't do you any good.

LIBBY: But if you mess up the words to the Our Father, that doesn't cancel it out.

KAI: It's this superstitious thinking that has sometimes caused Christians throughout the centuries to feel threatened by science.

LIBBY: But the Catholic Church actually has a Pontifical Academy of Sciences and encourages us to use faith and reason to complement each other, seeking truth in whatever forms we can find it.

KAI: Because, in doing so, we can know God better and better understand the world we live in.

LIBBY: As Pope Leo XIII said back in 1893, "Truth cannot contradict truth." And as Jesus tells us, "The truth will set you free."

KAI: Rather than check our brains at the door, Catholics believe that asking questions of all perceived truth is actually a good thing, because it's a sign of a healthy, active, curious faith.

LIBBY: And in case you're questioning whether we should still be talking, the answer is no.

 For Catholic Central, I'm Libby.

KAI: And I'm Kai. Thanks for watching.

LIBBY: For more on the Church's relationship to science, check out our episode on “Creation and Evolution,” and be sure to hit Subscribe.

KAI: And for more resources, check out our website, CatholicCentral.com.

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