

Well, probably my favorite movies of all time are Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings Trilogy*, which truly are a cinematic masterpiece. In fact I have this annual winter tradition where I watch all of the Lord of Rings movies in a row, extended edition of course. In all honesty, I've never read the books, but I hear they're really good. See I'm low culture, so I would always choose the movie over the book—my friends always make fun of me for that.

So in the climactic scene of *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, which is the third and final film of the trilogy, the main character Frodo Baggins, who's played by Elijah Wood, is standing over the fires of Mt. Doom with the evil Ring of Power that he has to destroy and the only way to destroy the ring is to throw it into the fiery lava of Mt. Doom, where it was made by the dark Lord Sauron.

So in this intense, dramatic scene, which I won't ruin for those who haven't seen *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo is standing there with the Ring of power over the fiery lava of Mt. Doom and he is struggling to destroy it. And his best friend and companion on the journey to Mt.

Doom, Samwise Gamgee, played by Sean Astin, is behind him yelling,
“What are you waiting for?! Just let it go!”

“Just let it go!” Brothers and sisters, these four words can be so instructive for us in our relationship with Christ our Savior. One of the prominent themes of today’s Liturgy of the Word is trusting in God. In the first reading we hear those beautiful words of the Prophet Jeremiah: “Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose hope is the LORD. He is like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream: it fears not the heat when it comes; its leaves stay green; in ***the year of drought it shows no distress, but still bears fruit.***”

Brothers and sisters if we want true and lasting happiness, freedom, love, and peace in our life, then we ***must trust totally*** in the God Who loves us more than we know. If we want to receive all of the graces that are necessary for our holiness, happiness, and salvation, then we must learn to abandon ourselves completely to our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, Who victoriously conquered our own suffering, death, and all of our sins.

In the Gospel today, our Lord Jesus is essentially telling us: if you want to be happy and free; if you want to enjoy the love you were created for, then don't trust in material wealth and earthly power, fame, and glory—*trust in Me! Trust in my love for you! Trust that I want the best for you and will give you the happiness that you truly seek!*

As many of you may know, trusting in God is much easier said than done, especially in a culture that is obsessed with personal autonomy and individual control at all costs. Our culture indoctrinates us to think that “if I can't control *everything*, then I'm not truly free.” Such an egotistical and self-centered attitude prevents us from humbly and lovingly trusting in God as well as in other people.

So our culture takes personal autonomy and individual control to the extreme, so much so that our pride can become so inflated to the point where we begin to view God as an oppressor, a competitor and even an enemy, rather than as a loving and merciful Father who loves us and truly wants the best for His children.

Brothers and sisters, at the root of all sin and pride, is a fundamental lack of trust in God. Why do we sin? It's pretty simple:

we sin because we don't trust God. We don't trust in His infinite goodness and love. We don't trust that God's law and His way is better than our way. We don't trust that God will give us the happiness, freedom, and love that we seek. We don't trust that God's moral law will truly make us happy and free, even though *that's exactly the purpose of God's moral law, which is an expression of His great love for us*. So when we sin, we choose our own selfish desires over the goodness and love of God. When we sin, we reject God because we fail to trust Him and His love for us.

We might also struggle to trust God because our fallen world and wounded human nature tempts us toward a spiritual skepticism that closes us off to the Lord and fosters great doubt in our hearts and minds. And yet, skepticism is a completely untenable system of belief because *doubt presupposes* the necessity of trust and the existence of objective truth. In other words, skeptics might instinctively think, "I *don't believe or trust you* because I believe there is *another truth* to be found!" A skeptic fails to trust and believe *something* because they want to trust and believe *something else*.

Since we're created for truth, we're created for certainty. *And since we're created for certainty, we're created for trust.* We simply can't live as human beings without trust. And so the happy, healthy, and reasonable medium between the two extremes of skepticism and credulity is what the Catholic Church calls the theological virtue of faith, which is the human response to God Who reveals Himself to us. In other words, faith is a grace-filled gift and human trust in God and all that He reveals and teaches to us.

What the virtue of faith teaches us is that trusting in God will lead us to the happiness, peace, freedom, healing, and love that we seek. We have every possible reason to trust completely in God, Who is Truth, Love, Mercy, and Goodness Itself. Trusting in God is truly the *most reasonable thing we can do as human beings*. Why we would not want to trust God Who lovingly created us and knows us better than we know ourselves? Why would we not want to trust the all-powerful and loving Creator of the universe? Why would we not want to trust our victorious Savior Jesus Christ, Who rose from the dead and proved His power over sin and death? Why would we not want to trust our Lord Jesus and the

teachings of His Church that *He established* to make us holy and lead us happily to salvation?

Returning to the powerful words of Samise Gamgee from the *Lord of the Rings*: “**Just let it go!**” Brothers and sisters, are we holding on to something that’s preventing us from fully trusting in God? Are we refusing to let go of something that’s stopping us from trusting completely in Jesus? Is it pride, selfishness, and ego? Is it fear or skepticism? Is it a hidden wound that needs healing? Is it a grudge? What is preventing us from surrendering completely in loving trust to the God Who loves us more than we can comprehend?

One of the most powerful and shortest prayers comes to us from the Divine Mercy devotion and that is: “Jesus, I trust in You.” In all honesty, we should pray this short, powerful prayer daily in our lives so that we can grow in trust of God and receive all of the grace-filled happiness, freedom, peace, and love that He wants to give us. So as we prepare to worship and receive our crucified and risen Savior in the Most Holy Eucharist, let us pray those much-needed and beautiful words of the Divine Mercy devotion: “Jesus, I trust in You.”