

Twenty Seventh Sunday October 02, 2016

Habakkuk 1:2-3;2:2-4; 2 Timothy 1:6-8,13-14; Luke 17:5-10

Our world is a challenging world and in this world we are all called to be prophets of God. We are invited to announce the good news of God's deep love for each one of us. It is indeed important that we manifest this call in our behaviour and daily activities and more importantly through our words. Today's readings are highly relevant to our own lives. On the one hand, we live in a world where thousands suffer appallingly in the struggle for truth, freedom and dignity of the human person. On the other hand, we live in a world of ever-increasing material indulgence becoming available to more and more people. The dream of being part of this can close our minds and hearts to the cry of the poor, distressed and marginalized. The affluent society becomes both a trap and an escape. Many like to blame God for many of the world's ills but, to be honest, they are practically all of our own making. In the Gospel the plea is to increase their faith that they may see. Jesus teaches them that they do not need an increase in faith so much as they need to put the little faith they have into action. Paul in the second reading tells Timothy to teach his community to use the precious gifts the Lord gave to serve by being courageously at the service of all who are in need. We must be aware that God's gift is not a spirit of timidity, but the Spirit of power, and love, and self-control. The first reading calls for fidelity to God in the midst of suffering and violence that people have experienced. The future belongs to God's faithful people.

In today's First Reading we heard the prophet Habakkuk calling out to the Lord because of the violence that surrounded him. Habakkuk who wrote before the Babylonian invasion complains to Yahweh that the enemies have ravished their territories. Destruction, violence, strife, contention, these had become the norm of the day. Habakkuk was frustrated because the Lord was not taking control of the situation. He complained that the Lord God would not save the people. Responding to Habakkuk's cry to Heaven, the Lord God answered, telling him to write the vision and make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. In His message, God said that there is still a vision for the appointed time which speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, he asked him to wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. In other words, God was telling him to wait patiently for the last age that will come. The last age, or the end, is the time in

which we now live. Then God concluded by saying that the man who is rash, he has no integrity. The wicked will come to a terrible end. But those who obey the commandments of God, they will live a long life. The righteous live by their faith.

Continuing on the subject of living faith, in today's Second Reading, Paul says to Timothy, to hold on to the standard of sound teaching that he had heard from his Paul, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus." Paul advises him to fan into a flame the gift that God has given him, namely the gifts and charisms of the Spirit, which is faith. Here Paul reminds his disciple that God has given him every gift necessary to carry out his ministry. He tells his disciple Timothy to keep the truths that he had learned from Paul in his preaching and personal conduct. Timothy was called to keep them in the faith and love that are in Jesus Christ since faith and love cannot be separated. Church teaches us that faith, hope and charity (love) are theological virtues. They are the foundation of Christian moral activity; they animate it and give it its special character. Timothy is instructed to foster the faith and to witness to it even at the cost of enduring great hardships. This gift of faith in Christ is not a spirit of timidity or a spirit of anxiousness about the future. It is, rather, the Spirit of power and love and self-control which is a divine gift.

Today's Gospel contains exhortations about faith and service. The request from the disciples for faith comes immediately after the warning of Jesus to beware of temptations to faith. The disciples would have realized the unwavering faith of Jesus in his Father. What the apostles were asking was greater confidence, greater trust in God, so that they could participate and continue the works of Jesus. They presupposed that they already have faith but not sufficient and so they ask Jesus to increase it. But Jesus response must have shocked them as he told them that they should have greater trust in God. When he gave the example of the mulberry tree to be uprooted, Jesus did not expect them to believe in the impossible. But he did expect his followers to allow God to make the impossible possible, with human cooperation. At the same time Jesus warned the disciples that faith and service to God is essential whereby faith expressed is rewarded. He told them that when a person has already performed his duty in faith, his response ought to be to say generously that he has done only what is expected of him and he is only his unworthy servant. In other words Jesus told the disciples that one can never have a claim on God. Our response to the one who gives us faith is of service. Hence faith for us is like a bridge that leads us to reach out to

one another and to God. Faith can build bridges, and bless with grace and at the same time remove all obstacles that come across our path.

The Gospel speaks to us about the disciples asking Jesus for an increase of faith. This prayer may well reflect the feelings of some communities of early Christians, who saw their future very bleak and they wondered whether, as a small minority in a sea of hostility and even persecution, they had any future at all. Historically in the ensuing centuries, many Christians had been overwhelmed with persecution and the destruction of their Church. The faith that is being asked for is not to have a better knowledge of our doctrine. What is being asked for is a much deeper and stronger trust and confidence that our God is near us, even when he seems so far away, that he will take care of his own people. That does not mean, however, that with such a faith Christian life will be free of all hardship and difficulty. Being a Christian, taking the Gospel seriously, is never going to be easy. God has promised his loving care but he has never promised a life free of pain, difficulties, suffering, or even sudden and violent death. What God did promise is that, with a deep faith and trust in him, we can endure pain and difficulties, that we can accept pain and suffering, if and when it comes, for the sake of making the message of Jesus a reality in our world.

The disciples had found the ministry of following Jesus difficult and challenging. They presuppose they already have faith but not sufficient. Their solution is to ask Jesus to increase their faith as if to increase it in quantity. Jesus responded to their request of faith. But instead of granting the disciples the request for more faith, Jesus declares that they have not even put into practice what little faith they already have. When they could not understand this he gives them a parable much related to the request they made. This parable puts the reader or the hearer in the place of the master. The story tells us the institution of the time of slavery and the master-slave relationship was indeed part of that culture. Under such conditions no master would ever think about rewarding a slave for doing what the slave was expected to do. Such a situation may not apply today; but like the behaviour of the slave, a person is called upon to deal with positive affirmation without expecting a reward for the work done.

So Jesus goes on to compare the Christian disciple with a servant of his own time, usually a slave. When the servant comes back from working hard in the fields all day, he is not told to come and relax since he had tired himself out with his work in the field. The instruction that the servant gets is that he has to hurry, tidy

himself and prepare the meal for his master. After the master has had enough and is satisfied, can he eat and have his rest. This parable of the unprofitable servant would have shocked the listeners not because of the use of the word slave, but because of the manner in which servant-hood is to be lived before God. A slave can never have a claim over his master, neither in the form of wages or as thanks quite independently of how much he has done for his master. His service is utterly taken for granted. The role of the slave is to serve the master and expect no recompense or affirmation. This indeed reflected on the attitude of people that salvation is the reward for the good performance of the law and statutes. It is necessary to realize the gratuitousness of the choice of God and the faith coming as a gift to humanity.

Jesus uses this parable to teach the disciples that there is never a time in the life of discipleship when one has done all one can do and therefore should be rewarded for good work. First of all the good that a disciple does is as much the fruit of God's grace as it is disciple's good efforts. Secondly there is never a time in the life of discipleship when a disciple can say that he or she has done enough. Human effort always comes short when compared to what God deserves. The parable teaches us the valuable lesson on humility. We must be aware that our faith is increased by our works that are manifested by the power of the Holy Spirit. Faith is increased by serving others, not by being served. Faith is increased when we manifest our love towards others, our family, friends and strangers. True faith is unselfish. Living faith is unselfish faith. It seeks to give rather than receive. It seeks to obey God, not "me, I and myself." Unselfish faith is humble, not full of pride. It admits that "We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done." Hence our Faith has to be an attitude, conviction and conduct based on a right relationship with God. It is not static, but grows in strength and depth as we nourish that relationship with our Creator throughout our lives. It is a bond of relationship based on the God who reveals himself continuously through his creative, redemptive and sanctification works.

Although this Gospel passage is addressed to the Apostles, they apply to each one of us in our daily life situation. Following the example of the apostles we must all pray for greater trust in God. Most of us inclined to forget God and in his providence when all things here go fine and as per plan. At this moment we forget to thank God for the blessings. The moment a storm arises in our life then we begin to think of him. We may remember the storm at the Lake as the Apostles

were rowing cheerfully across the lake. They would have been celebrating the multiplication of loaves and their share in the miracles. Only when in trouble they could remember him and shouted to him for help. There was the joy they experienced in his presence. The lesson we have is to experience his presence all the time as we fulfil the task given to us. Ultimately we are chosen as his disciples to carry on his message to all.

As we reflect upon these words, let us review what kind of faith that we have. The disciples rightly understood that faith is a gift and we can get it by asking and praying for it. Jesus used the example of faith as small as a tiny seed to move a large tree a seemingly impossible thing becomes possible. We have plenty of examples such as the light bulb, airplane, space travel, television, medical marvels and the rest. In the supernatural order it is only faith that can save the world. The Gospel also teaches us the necessity of humble service before God. Our relationship with him is one of total and unconditional love and service. In a true, loving relationship, whether it is with God or another person, the joy and satisfaction is in unconditional giving and sharing. Let us ask ourselves today whether we have unselfish faith that will draw us closer to Jesus. As we continue with the celebration of the Holy Mass, let us remember those who are in need of the gift of faith so that they may grow in the love of Jesus.

This short parable, this object lesson, helps to complete Jesus' teaching on faith. Actually, here we are no longer dealing with faith, but rather with order and obedience. This is true. But these two things are one. When someone believes in God, whom he does not see, in God who reveals himself in his Son Jesus, he bows down and humbles himself before a being that is infinitely wiser and more powerful than he is. He who believes in God does not do what he himself wants, but rather what God wants: he carries out the command of God; he obeys God, who dictates to him his Word in his Son Jesus.

A nurse took the tired, anxious serviceman to the bedside. "Your son is here," she said to the old man repeatedly before the patient's eyes opened. Heavily sedated because of the pain of his heart attack, he dimly saw the young uniformed Marine standing. He reached out his hand. The Marine wrapped his toughened fingers around the old man's limp ones, squeezing a message of love and encouragement. The nurse brought a chair so that the Marine could sit and all through the night the Young Marine sat there in the poorly lighted ward, holding

the old man's hand and offering him words of love and strength. Occasionally, the nurse suggested that the Marine rest awhile. He refused. Whenever the nurse came into the ward, the Marine was oblivious of her and of the night noises of the hospital. Now and then she heard him say a few gentle words. The dying man said nothing, only held tightly to his son all through the night. Along towards dawn, the old man died. The Marine released the now lifeless hand he had been holding and went to tell the nurse. While she did what she had to do, he waited. Finally, she returned. She started to offer words of sympathy, but the Marine interrupted her. "Who was that man?" he asked. The nurse was startled, "He was your father," she answered. "No, he wasn't," the Marine, replied. "I never saw him before in my life." "Then why didn't you say something when I took you to him?" "I knew right away there had been a mistake, but I also knew he needed his son, and his son just wasn't here. When I realized that he was too sick to tell whether or not I was his son, knowing how much he needed me, I stayed."

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