

6th October 2019 (27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

Habakkuk 1:2-3,2:2-4; Psalm 94(95):1-2,6-9; 2 Timothy 1:6-8,13-14; Luke 17:5-10.

'Lord, increase our faith.'

What is faith? I think that we can often confuse the concept of faith with religion or catechism. To grow in faith, I need to know and learn about the person I have been invited to trust. Catechism teaches me about God and what is expected of me as a person of faith, but it does not by itself increase my faith. Indeed, anyone can learn catechism, even those who profess that they do not believe in God can be experts in catechism without responding to it in faith.

Faith is a belief, a total trust in a God who is bigger than ourselves. God creates us, keeps us, and invites us to share in his life. When two or three share the same faith in God, together they find ways how to express their faith, especially through worship and through liturgy. Religion is the formal expression of the faith of a group of people. Some people participate in religion without having faith, others are people of faith but cannot identify with any particular religion.

Faith leads me to place God first in everything I do in my life, trusting that God will continue drawing me to himself. In the book of Genesis, we are told that we are created in the image and likeness of God; God breathes his life in us, dwells in us and invites us to share in his divine life here on earth and in the next life. Faith is my acceptance of this loving invitation by placing myself in God's loving care.

It is not always easy to fully trust and have faith in a God I cannot see; it is a daily exercise of listening to God in my life and accepting his will. If only I could really trust myself in God's hand, at least for one small moment in my life, I would move mountains! Alas my faith is limited! St Paul tells us that here on earth we see things as if through a mirror; that is the best we can achieve.

Jesus invites us to have faith. A little faith (the size of a small mustard seed) can produce great things (the mustard tree is a large tree)! If we really believed we could ask the mulberry tree, which has a very extensive root system and is very difficult to uproot, to move itself and plant itself in the sea. This is an obvious case of a hyperbole; Jesus is not inviting us to go around shifting trees from one place to the other! If only we could really and fully trust God, we could perform miracles; people could look at us and feel inspired and also come to believe in the God of love and mercy.

Trusting in God (and the earlier instructions not to give scandal and to always forgive, Lk 17:1-4) is our response to God's creative love. God has placed his life within us so that we can be drawn to love and trust him fully. We are free to reject God's invitation to share in his life, but when, through faith, we accept God's call, we are not performing anything special; we are simply living out and responding to God's call. We are like the servant who does not expect to be thanked for simply doing his duty towards his master.

How can we grow in faith? Faith is a gift God has given each one of us. Through creation and again in Baptism, we are oriented towards God, drawn to this God of love. In order to grow in faith, we need to nurture it like we would nurture a seedling. In Baptism we are given a burning candle to represent our faithful response to God. If we are not careful, our flame can easily be extinguished. Our duty is to ensure that our faith keeps burning. Like other relationships, faith needs to be nurtured by spending time with the person we love. Faith grows when we find time to sit and listen to God's voice within us and around us. We can meet God in nature, in our family and friends, in the poor and those who are suffering.

Let us try to continually live by the adage: 'thy will be done!'

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