

ECHOING GOD'S WORD
in
THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY
Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 2, 2022

Lectionary Readings:

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

The righteous shall live by their faith.
Guard the truth entrusted to you.
Lord, increase our faith!

Luke:

Luke is coming to the end of the second part of the teachings of Jesus during the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. It is time to recapitulate. (The Journey extends from Chapter 9:51 to Chapter 19:27. The first part of the instruction was found up to 13:21; the second part: 13:22 to 17:10; finally, the third part will extend from 17:11 to 19:27.)

We are dealing with the inner renewal of the disciples. Remember that Luke addresses us also in this teaching. He wrote for a specific community, faced with particular issues of renewal urgency. Our church community faces the same need of renewal. It has to reach into the very heart of the assembly gathered for prayer.

The Lectionary omits the verses that warn the members of the community against causing their brothers and sisters to defect from the way of Christ. There are dire consequences for those who act this way: the millstone around the neck! Some say that Luke was especially conscious of Church leaders who were the cause of scandal. Forgiveness of wrongs needs to be addressed.

Again, those in leadership seem to be the ones urged in this ministry of forgiveness. In the light of these difficult commands, the apostles say to Jesus: "Increase our faith." It is obvious that this text is meant especially for the leaders of the Church in which Luke lived and taught. If they are to be guarded against giving scandal and always forgive those who repent of even the most terrible crimes, then they will certainly need the uplifting power of the Risen Christ in their lives. Against these superhuman forces with which they are to contend, only a divine power flowing from the graciousness of God can give them the strength they need. Faith must flow deeply in and around them; faith must immerse them in the presence and the power of God himself. Only then will they be able to function effectively as community leaders.

But Jesus assures them that faith is not measured quantitatively. Having entrusted themselves completely to the care of God in Christ, they can do the impossible. It is God who does the work in those who have been immersed in the dying and rising of Jesus Christ. It is no human power anymore. The absolutely unthinkable becomes thinkable and possible. The *mulberry tree* has a root system that extends far beyond the shade of its branches. These roots reach very deep into the earth. Just as it would take superhuman forces to uproot that tree and plant it into the sea [and have it thrive there!], even so that divine power already resides in the hearts of those who believe in Jesus Christ

In Chapter 12, verses 35-37, servants who are vigilant will be served by the appreciative master. The other side of that coin is that servants do not really deserve to be served. They are just doing what is expected of them. The fact remains that we are not God! What God does through our ministry in the Church remains God's gift. The minister is not the source of his or her own ministry. God's gifts are never earned. They're graciously given.

Habakkuk:

The religious reforms initiated under King Josiah, who had died in 609 BCE, were now being relaxed, and corruption once more entered into the lives of the people of God. The prophet laments the desperate state into which the nation has fallen. The kind of faith that will see them through needs to be that “steadfast trust” that God will not abandon them. Biblical laments never hesitate to complain to God about how terrible life has become. But then, biblical faith always lifts up the heart and gives it unshakable confidence.

Timothy:

In the verse immediately before this passage, we hear that Timothy received his faith from his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice. That most precious gift from God must now be rekindled into a blazing fire and brought into service for the good of the community. It is because of this faith of his that Timothy has come to be designated as leader of this Christian community.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What has been your experience of the power of faith in your life? Do you consider that God has enabled you to do what was humanly impossible? Have you been able to overcome obstacles that you thought insurmountable? Can you recount some events in your life that illustrate the power of faith? Can you verify the saying that “God chooses the weak and makes them strong?”

2. Have you had the experience of trying to forgive someone who has caused you great harm and deep pain? Was it easy? Did you quickly get over your resentment of that person? Can you witness to the fact that only a direct gift of divine grace makes it possible for us to forgive from the heart someone who has hurt us or hurt someone we love?

3. Discuss the scandal given by Church leaders, lay and clergy, who are not faithful to the standards of Christian moral living. What harm has been done in the Church and to the Church by priests who have violated the sacredness of children, of minors, of women, of men who were vulnerable? What scandal is sometimes given by lay leaders in the Church?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Faithfulness on the part of the Church requires that its leaders take responsibility for the harm done by some of its members. Can you and your parish do something to make amends for the sins of the community?

PRAYER

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,

and in Jesus Christ,
his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by
the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting. Amen.

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

Religious faith often provokes the greatest of controversies among people who will defend their particular understanding of faith with a force that sometimes turns to violence. Some of the fiercest disagreements among human beings seem to be rooted in perceived challenges to their personal and communal religious commitments. People go to war for the sake of religion and of faith.

What is faith? In the Catholic tradition, we have stressed the *content of faith*, the things we believe, the statements of faith, the creeds, the dogmas of faith. Faith is what we believe. We will go on for hours telling others what we believe and what we believe in. That emphasis comes to us especially from the definitions of Church councils, from Trent in the 16th century, to Vatican I in 1870. When the Enlightenment Era began to cast doubt on the truth of human knowledge and questioned the legitimacy of religious statements and of religious truths, the Catholic Church countered that movement by asserting the legitimacy of human knowledge about God and the verifiability of religious truths. We leaned over backward to stress that faith was found in *truths of faith*.

The Protestant experience of personalizing the religious event in people's lives had come to stress especially the trust dimension of faith. Faith was basically a trust that God would fulfill his promises. Religious faith is rooted in the absolute trustworthiness of God. To believe religiously is to believe in God. Faith is the human response to God's saving deeds on our behalf. Christian faith involves a commitment to the person of Jesus Christ. Faith has to do with trust and commitment.

Now, is it one or the other? Is it not a question of both rather than of one or the other? Faith is both trusting in God and believing in the truths of statements about God. Faith has to do with commitment to God and to God's will. Faith can also be expressed in propositional statements or creedal formulations.

Since the developments of the Second Vatican Council, we feel more comfortable with those expressions that stress faith as trust and confidence in God, without abandoning our emphasis on faith as also consisting in beliefs.

See: **The Catechism: # 26, 142, 146, 150, 155, 176.**

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