

Homily 27-OT-C

In our first reading, Habakkuk complains to the Lord. God tells him that what he is waiting for will come in time. Habakkuk's world seemed to be under the control of God's enemies. He sees misery and destruction around him, doesn't see God doing anything to resolve the chaos and he wonders why God doesn't seem to hear when his people cry out for help. Habakkuk sounds like us today.

Over the past 7 years, one of the basic lessons from our parish Bible studies has been the historical perspective on God's relationship with his people – with us. This relationship has been developing over thousands of years, and both scripture and tradition have shown us how God's plan for us has been in progress for a long time. As humans, we can't grasp the full extent of God's plan, and we question God's ways. But I hope we can see how it has brought us closer to God over time. Even when we can't explain current events, we are called to trust in God and have faith in the goodness, the justice, and the promises of God.

In our second reading, Saint Paul writes to Timothy and encourages him to be faithful to the Gospel. St. Paul prays that Timothy will “stir into flame” the gift of God that Timothy has received through his ordination. We have all received a similar gift from God - through our baptism and confirmation - to be witnesses - to act on our faith.

In the Gospel, the Apostles say to Jesus: “Increase our faith.” But we don't hear what comes right before this request from the apostles. Just before this, Jesus has warned them 1) about not leading others into sin, 2) about trying to correct a brother or sister - never an easy thing, and then, 3) to be always willing to forgive a repentant brother or sister – maybe the hardest of all!

That seems to be why they say, hey, Lord, you're asking a lot - to do all of that, we going to need more faith.

Jesus responds by comparing faith to a mustard seed, and then by clarifying the role of a good servant. Like the disciples, we, too, can ask God for an increase in faith, but watch out for his answer. Jesus reminds us that even with the tiniest amount of faith, we have the capacity to do great things in his name.

So the apostles want more, figuring QUANTITY is the issue. But Jesus says even faith the size of a mustard seed would be enough to unearth a mulberry tree and cast it into the sea. He's using strong language here, but he does make his point: it is not the quantity, but the QUALITY of faith that matters. Maybe our faith doesn't have to increase – but it does have to be there!

Having faith doesn't automatically give the believer the power to perform crowd-pleasing spectacles. But faith does mean that we are in touch with God and that we experience God as the source of the power that enables us to live the life of a disciple of Jesus.

The point is that faith can do great things - things that are technically impossible, because faith accomplishes these things through the power of God. That's why faith can do supernatural things. And that's the basic point of this very short but powerful parable.

Beyond that, Jesus is trying to teach us the virtue of humility, to help us remember that in the grand scheme of things, the Lord is still our master and we are literally, in the original Greek: “worthless slaves.”

We don't like to hear it and it's a little harsh, but a lot of Jesus' sayings are harsh, and sometimes they're harsh because they're meant to get our attention. What Jesus is saying is that “we are all servants, and God is our master, so when we keep his commandments, there shouldn't be some kind of expectation of rewards, because all we are doing is our duty.”

So the pairing of these two parables - one teaching the virtue of faith; the other teaching the virtue of humility - makes sense. It takes humility to put trust in God - to trust that no matter what happens in this life, God is the one who is in charge. God can do impossible things with the tiniest gift of faith - if we trust Him. So Jesus is trying to call the apostles, and us, to humility and

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to trust in God. Jesus is reminding his disciples that part of a life of discipleship is fulfilling our duties and not expecting praise and reward simply for carrying out what we're supposed to do.

So perhaps that might be the answer to the pairing of these two parables. One teaches the virtue of faith; the other teaches the virtue of humility. And those two things really do go together, because it takes humility to put trust in God and to trust that no matter what happens in our lives, no matter what happens in our world, God is the one who is in command. God can do impossible things with the tiniest gift of faith if we trust Him. I think that's what Jesus is trying to tell us in the Gospel for today.

Amen?

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- Deacon Jack Schaefer