

“If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.” Words from our Gospel this evening from the 17th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke – sisters and brothers, may the Lord give to you his peace and his joy.

I know I’ve already used this image for us once before, but it’s worth sharing again today. Picture this: there is a wide canyon with a tightrope stretched over the empty gorge. As the tightrope walker was about to cross, he asked the crowd watching him, “do you believe that I can do this?” They replied, “Yes, you are the famous tightrope walker we’ve all heard of; we believe that you can cross with no problem.” So, with their encouragement, he went out across the rope and, keeping his balance, crossed the canyon to the other side and back. Then, he got a wheelbarrow and asked the crowd, “Do you believe that I can tightrope across while pushing a wheelbarrow?” The crowd responded excitedly, “Yes, yes show us what you got.” And so, to the astonishment of the crowd, the tightrope walker pushed the wheelbarrow over the tightrope to the other side of the wide canyon and back. Finally, the tightrope walker asked his audience, “Now I ask, do you have faith in me, that I can cross this canyon with the wheelbarrow?” The crowd was enthusiastic, “We’ve seen what you can do; go out and do it again. We have faith in you!” The tightrope walker replied solemnly, “If you have faith in me, then put yourself into the wheelbarrow.”

The disciples in our Gospel today ask Jesus to increase their faith. At first glance, it seems like a reasonable request. In fact, I’m tempted to say, “I’ll take all the faith that I can get. Lord, increase my faith too!” But such an attitude towards faithfulness is really a misunderstanding of what it means to have faith in the first place. Jesus responds to the request for an “increase of faith” by declaring that the size of one’s faith doesn’t matter. Indeed, even the smallest speck of faith can do great things - if you had faith but the size of a mustard seed, the smallest of all the seeds, you could then say to the full-grown mulberry bush with all its intricate root systems: “be uprooted and planted in the sea and it would obey you.” So, faith, Jesus tells us, is not a matter of how much. It’s quality, not quantity. Rather, our faith in Jesus Christ is ultimately about putting ourselves into the wheelbarrow. Our faith is a fundamental and deep-seated decision to trust in God and in God’s ability to carry us in all things, over the hurt, over the brokenness, over the emptiness of those valleys of our lives, and bring us safely to the other side. Overall, it’s not about who has more faith or greater faith. Faith is normative. Either we get into the wheelbarrow or we don’t. Either we trust God or we don’t.

I was talking with someone recently, and he was comparing himself to other people who lived very active lives of faith. Feeling inadequate, he declared with great resignation, “I guess I

have a long way to go in my faith.” Don’t judge yourselves so harshly. St. Francis of Assisi had his own path. Mother Teresa had her own path. It’s being faithful to the path of holiness that God has put before you and you alone that matters. Being faithful looks more like the servant from today’s Gospel. For that servant, it’s not a matter of how much faith he or she has, but of simply being faithful to the master, dependably setting about their given task to work in the fields and wait on table: “We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.” Jesus asks us all to follow him, to lead a moral life, to uphold social justice, to love one another with the same love God has for us. And whether it be in our offices, our schools, our homes or wherever our path takes us, we are invited time and time again, to put ourselves into the wheelbarrow and reaffirm our faith in Jesus in the various happenings of our lives.

Of course, being faithful does have its struggles. The prophet Habakkuk tells of the great violence he sees in ancient times, and he feels that God is absent. There are times today, where we could say the same thing as Habakkuk: “God, don’t you see all these moral depravities? Why do you let your Church falter? What about the wars in our world, all the mass shootings? Not to mention all of our own personal struggles and difficulties...” With Habakkuk we say, “Why do you let me see ruin? Why must I look at misery? Violence and destruction are before me.” While our faith might be shaken, we are assured, like Habakkuk of old, that faith is what gets us through these things, by faith we will live, so do not be rash because the justice and fulfillment of God is assured. On the other hand, sometimes our faith can become tired, lukewarm, and indifferent in our waiting. While our faith may not be extinguished, what was once a roaring fire has become a quiet ember. St. Paul warns the unenthusiastic Timothy that he should stir it back into flame with the help of the Spirit, lest his faithfulness go out and disappear altogether.

So, it’s not easy to be faithful, and there are times when our faith is tested, where we might be discouraged or might lapse in our witness to the Gospel. It happens to us all – that is why we have these stories in the Scriptures to comfort us and assure us that we are not alone in our struggle. And herein lies the great hope. I don’t have to be a good tightrope walker. I don’t have to push the wheelbarrow or even figure out how to keep it steady. No matter the size of my faith or the circumstances in which I find myself, I just have to get in. When I make that leap of faith, I will discover that it is God who does the work. It is Jesus, the master tightrope walker, who in the power of the Holy Spirit will bring us safely across to our heavenly Father where peace and mercy abounds and will take care of all other things besides. So, let us say confidently before God and others: “Lord Jesus, I have faith in you. I will get into the wheelbarrow, knowing that you won’t let me fall but will carry me across and bring me home, safe and sound.” Let us therefore stand and reaffirm our trust in God as we profess our faith.

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 141

Reading 1

Hab 1:2-3; 2:2-4

How long, O LORD? I cry for help
but you do not listen!
I cry out to you, "Violence!"
but you do not intervene.
Why do you let me see ruin;
why must I look at misery?
Destruction and violence are before me;
there is strife, and clamorous discord.
Then the LORD answered me and said:
Write down the vision clearly upon the tablets,
so that one can read it readily.
For the vision still has its time,
presses on to fulfillment, and will not disappoint;
if it delays, wait for it,
it will surely come, it will not be late.
The rash one has no integrity;
but the just one, because of his faith, shall live.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

R. (8) If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD;
let us acclaim the Rock of our salvation.
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us joyfully sing psalms to him.

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Come, let us bow down in worship;
let us kneel before the LORD who made us.

For he is our God,
and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides.

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Oh, that today you would hear his voice:
"Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,
as in the day of Massah in the desert,
Where your fathers tempted me;
they tested me though they had seen my works."
R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Reading 2

2 Tm 1:6-8, 13-14

Beloved:
I remind you, to stir into flame
the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands.
For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice
but rather of power and love and self-control.
So do not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord,
nor of me, a prisoner for his sake;
but bear your share of hardship for the gospel
with the strength that comes from God.

Take as your norm the sound words that you heard from me,
in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.
Guard this rich trust with the help of the Holy Spirit
that dwells within us.

Alleluia

1 Pt 1:25

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
The word of the Lord remains forever.
This is the word that has been proclaimed to you.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Lk 17:5-10

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."
The Lord replied,
"If you have faith the size of a mustard seed,
you would say to this mulberry tree,
'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

"Who among you would say to your servant
who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field,

'Come here immediately and take your place at table'?
Would he not rather say to him,
'Prepare something for me to eat.
Put on your apron and wait on me while I eat and drink.
You may eat and drink when I am finished'?
Is he grateful to that servant because he did what was commanded?
So should it be with you.
When you have done all you have been commanded,
say, 'We are unprofitable servants;
we have done what we were obliged to do.'"