

SERMON 27C 2025.

My friends we gather in this new month of October, this month of the rosary, the month of special devotion to Mary, and ask for her prayers for our world in these difficult days through which we are living, with the terrible ongoing conflict in Gaza and Ukraine, and with the attack on the Synagogue in Manchester last Thursday. We seek comfort and strength in our faith, and today also remind ourselves, despite the present hardships to thank God our Father for all his blessings, for the good things we do have, as we celebrate this Harvest Sunday. We give thanks today for all the good things we have, and out of our abundance offer help to those in need by many of you having brought items for the local foodbank today to help those in need and also the fruits of last Friday's CAFOD Harvest fast day, and today we have our collection for CAFOD, to help those in need in the wider world. Almsgiving is one of the works of charity, one of those ways in which we show forth our faith, that even when we are in need, we still try to help those less fortunate than ourselves, both locally and in the developing world. And of course we should also pray, hence the prayer card you were given when you came to Church today and of course in this month of October we can pray the Rosary.

The readings that we have just heard for this 27th Sunday of the year, have the theme of staying faithful, of persevering in faith, often in the face of the peer pressure of society to doubt and turn away from our faith, and also in the face of the evil we often see around us, which can tempt us to doubt our faith. That was the case with the Prophet Habakkuk in the 1st reading, where he talks of the oppression that is around him, of injustice, of outrage and violence, contention and discord, all this evil is tempting him to doubt his faith in God-how can there be a good God if all this evil flourishes, the prophet asks. I presume that you must have asked yourself the same question, when we hear of some terrible act of violence, in this country or abroad, when we hear of massacres taking place in some far off place of violence, when we are left stunned by the evil of men-why doesn't God act we ask, or perhaps in our own lives, when we or a loved one suffer in some way and we ask, why does God let this happen. Our faith is put to the test, we are tempted to doubt, to despair, to think that there isn't a God or perhaps he just doesn't care. I have met people who have come to this conclusion and they have abandoned their faith. What answer is given to Habakkuk, what does God say to him? – be patient, still trust in me – for the upright man will live by his faithfulness, in other words by persevering in faith.

Our faithfulness to God will guide us through the evil we often experience, our faith will help us to stand upright. This was also the message of Paul to his own disciple Timothy in the 2nd reading. Paul writes to him because he had heard Timothy was flagging a bit, he had been through some difficult times, and maybe his faith had weakened a bit, and so Paul writes to him to encourage him to persevere. He tells him to never be ashamed of his faith, and to bear the hardships for the sake of the Gospel – in other words once again to stand upright and to live by his faithfulness. In the Gospel reading the Disciples find themselves in the same place as Habakkuk and Timothy, they say to Jesus, “Lord increase our faith.” Perhaps they felt like that because they had heard so much of Our Lord's preaching, that they felt utterly inadequate, they felt the discipleship he called them to was beyond them, perhaps they also sensed the opposition growing against Jesus and doubted their own courage in being able to stay with Jesus; so they ask him to strengthen their faith. The answer Jesus gives about the mustard seed is I think not a criticism of them but Jesus telling them that they did have faith, that even if their faith felt small and inadequate they would be able to do amazing things-even to command a tree to grow and plant itself in the sea.

But then after consoling them and encouraging them he talks about the nature of faith and what it means to be a person of faith, of how faith is all about being a servant of God and being content with that, as a good servant is content to serve his master, so must we be content to serve God our Father. This can seem a bit harsh perhaps and yet this is exactly the example set us by Jesus, he was content, despite being God's son to become a man, to take on our weak human condition and to suffer and die for us out of obedience to his father. Jesus despite being God's son was content to serve his father and us, in our lives of faith we need to do

the same. We often talk about Jesus as the suffering servant, who suffered so that our sins would be forgiven, might we be asked to do the same, to suffer as he did, maybe to suffer by standing upright in faith in the midst of a world that is so often evil and rejects faith in God. Perhaps it is a triumph and a sign of a strong faith simply to be faithful in this world, to be upright in faith, maybe when we question our faith like the disciples did, maybe when we ask God to strengthen our faith, when we sense that our faith is weak, then our faith is actually much stronger than we think.

So let us follow the example of the Prophet Habakkuk, of Timothy and of the disciples and pray that our faith will be strengthened. Let us be upright in faith, that we will live by our faithfulness, that even in the midst of all the suffering and evil that can surround us, in the midst of the doubt we often feel we will persevere in faith. Amen.