

## 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in the Ordinary Time C

### Lord, Increase our Faith!

Habakkuk 1:2-3; 2:2-4; Psalm 95:1-2,6-7,8-9; 2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14; Luke 17:5-10

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The Collect Prayer of the Holy Mass sets the tone for the readings this weekend, which focuses on faith in God and our dependence of His grace: "Almighty ever-living God, who in the abundance of your kindness surpasses the merits and the desires of those who entreat you, **pour out your mercy upon us to pardon what conscience dreads and to give what prayer does not dare to ask.**"

Let us pay attention to the highlighted words: "to pardon what conscience dreads or with great trepidations — we beg God's complete forgiveness, especially those repeated sins that we know but we keep doing and are helpless without His grace; and "to give what prayer does not dare to ask – begging for the grace to make our hearts desire only for God, to suffer for others than material comfort, to be the least servant of all, to live a holy life, not just a long life.

The prayer reiterates what we already knew: the importance of our dependence on God's grace. So, we make our prayer the request of the disciples to Jesus: "Lord, increase our faith" (Lk. 17:5). It is a humble acknowledgment that, like the disciples, our faith is insufficient. We acknowledge our dependence on God's grace as we continue our journey toward heaven.

At some point in our lives, we cannot avoid encountering hard times, difficulties, pain, and suffering in various forms. Often, we spend a significant amount of our time and energy trying to solve our problems. Many are tempted to ask, "If God is truly good and loves me, why does this tragedy happen to me?" At times, it can be discouraging to remain faithful to God and uphold the values Jesus taught when we are maligned and persecuted.

These unsettling thoughts are expressed in the cries of the Prophet Habakkuk, who calls out to God, "How long, O Lord, must I cry for help, and you do not listen? Or cry out to you, 'Violence!' and you do not intervene! Why do you let me see ruin? Why must I look at misery?" (Habakkuk 1:1-3).

At first glance, it may seem like Prophet Habakkuk is blaming God's silence. However, his words are not those of someone who lacks faith in God. His complaint is a prayer of lamentation, seeking to understand God's workings and questioning where God is amid tragedy. His lamentation is similar to a person crying before the Blessed Sacrament. Crying before the Lord could be a profound prayer; hence, the most profound prayer is often not when we are composed, but when we are humbled.

God was not displeased with his lamentation; He heard Habakkuk and responded with gentle and reassuring words, as if saying, "Be patient, for I have a plan. I will intervene at the right time. What I ask of you now is faith, and if you have it, you will live" (cf. Habakkuk 2:4). Faith is the key that can provide insight into the mystery of pain, sorrow, and anguish that we all experience at different times in our lives. While faith is a gift, it also entails obligations and responsibilities that require our dedication. St. Paul reminds us in the second reading to "stir into flame the gift of God" (2 Timothy 1:6), which means to cultivate and nurture it.

One effective way to rekindle our faith is by opening our senses, hearts, and minds to the world around us. Gerard Manley Hopkins said, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out, like shining from shook foil." The world is filled with the life, love, and beauty of its loving Creator. Nature serves as a sacrament, a sign of God's goodness.

It is profoundly beneficial to unplug or shut down our gadgets regularly -- cellphone, computer, iPads, tablets -- and go out to gaze at the sky, counting the stars at night, to behold the glory of God; or to spend outside

watching and contemplating the cloud and the blue sky, listening to chirping of birds, and sounds of the wind, that we may develop a contemplative attitude like St. Francis of Assisi. He considered God's creation part of his family, referring to the Sun and Moon as his brother and sister. God can enter our hearts and stir our faith only if we learn to see, listen, and reflect. As the responsorial psalm reminds us, "If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Ps. 95:8). Only those who are self-absorbed and have hardened hearts can remain unaffected by the beauty of a rainbow, a sunrise, or a sunset. By cultivating this awareness, the flame of faith burns more brightly.

The ultimate way to rekindle the gift of faith is hinted at in our Gospel, which suggests that we are all servants, not lords; we are stewards, not masters (Lk. 17:7-10). It is to humble ourselves and be always dependent on God's grace. It starts with the disciples' petition: "Lord, increase our faith" (Luke 17:5). This must be our ongoing prayer.

Notice how our Lord Jesus responds: "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you" (Luke 17:6). Our Lord compares faith to a tiny mustard seed, whose power does not depend on its size but on the tremendous potential hidden within it. He highlights that it is not the quantity of our faith that matters, but its quality. Even a small, genuine faith can wield incredible power. St. Paul's letter to Timothy reminds us that God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but rather a spirit of power, love, and self-control (cf. 2 Timothy 1:6-7).

When we possess faith even as small as a mustard seed, we can accomplish what would otherwise seem impossible. Often, it is God who does the heavy lifting – remember, our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth!

One profound experience I witnessed regarding faith happened when I administered the sacrament of anointing to a sister from the Missionary Sisters of Mary (MSM) who was suffering from cancer. She was fragile and dependent on tube feeding. I was so careful to trace the holy oil on her forehead, for I might hurt her. The infirmary room was dimly lit. After I prayed and performed the anointing rite, I asked her, "How are you holding up, sister?" She smiled slightly, nodded, and pointed towards the wall. On the wall, I saw a crucifix. She knew the enduring presence of Jesus by heart and offered her suffering for the sake of her community.

"Lord, increase our faith!" This is our prayer, now and always; for it is faith in God—faith in His love, faith in His fidelity, compassion, and loving kindness; faith in God's all-seeing vision and ability to bring good out of evil—that enables us to rise above our pain, even on broken wings. He gives us the power to cope with difficulties, overcome obstacles, and even accomplish great things, just like the saints.

Lord, increase our faith!

Fr. Manny Hewe  
Pastor