

27TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, C

FAITH AS A JOURNEY

“Lord, increase our faith” (Luke 17: 5)

We Live in Faith: Our Readings this Sunday, 27th Sunday in Ordinary time, invite us to deeper understanding of the dynamics of our faith in God and in Christ Jesus. When we think of faith in the broad sense of believing in something or somebody to be reliable, then we can agree that we make a daily, if not a more frequent, acts of faith. For examples, we believe in the physical structures – that the house we live would still be standing by the time we rise tomorrow morning that is why we sleep soundly in it; we have faith in the car that it would take us to our destination; we believe in the planes we board that it would not crash; we have faith in our parents, siblings and even friends that they would be there for us most of the times. We have faith in many things, and we demonstrate this in so many and different ways, even when these things have failed at different times. It is much easier to have faith in these things and people because we can see them. But having faith in God, Whom we cannot and do not see, is a very different consideration. This is the reality that the apostles openly admitted and prayed Jesus to come to their aid. The request of the apostles in the Gospel today should in fact be the daily prayer of every coherent Christian.

“Lord, increase our faith”: The immediate context of this request was after Jesus had told the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (which we read last Sunday – Luke 16: 19-31); He then turned to His disciples to address them on the subject of sin, its certainty and the punishment that awaits those who cause others to sin (Luke 17: 1-3); finally He taught them to forgive a brother even if “he sins against you seventy times seven times in one day, and each time comes to you saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him” (Luke 17: 3-4). The apostles’ response to these was the request for an increase in faith. One wonders if the challenging import of the teachings necessitated this timeless request. We need faith in God, to love and share our riches with the poor, we need faith to overcome sin, not to cause others to sin; and we need faith to forgive everyone as often as they offend us. At that point, the apostles must have realised the challenging demands of their calling, and the fact that they could not accomplish them on their own. Therefore, they made this request. Do we realise that we cannot do it alone? We must remember that faith is a supernatural gift of God.

But what exactly does it mean to have faith in God? The Letter to the Hebrews (11: 1) defines faith as “to be sure of things we hope for, to be certain of things we cannot see.” The key element here is “things we hope for” and “things we cannot see.” In this strict religious sense, having faith is believing or trusting in something that we cannot see. Faith in God, therefore, is to guaranty oneself that there is God, and to trust in Him even when we cannot see Him. This implies that we must accept that God is our loving Creator and Father, Who loves us so much that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ to die so that we might live to the full and have eternal life. To believe that He cares and watches over us in all circumstances of our lives; that He never abandons us, for He has numbered our hairs (Matthew 10: 30-32; Luke 12: 7) and carved us into the palms of His hands (Isaiah 49: 16). This is easier said than done.

Faith as a Journey: One must develop a personal relationship with God to have faith in Him. Trust in God is built on that relationship. Through this relationship, we share in the power of the Son of God, Who was able to do more than we could ever imagine. The ability to speak to the mulberry tree comes from this intimate relationship that enables the one who has faith to draw from that ultimate source of power. It is within this context of faith built on relationship and trust that the wise words of Pope Francis come alive: “The life of faith is a journey.” He explains:

Journeying is an art because if we are always in a hurry, we get tired and don't arrive at our journey's goal. If we stop, we don't go forward, and we also miss the goal. Journeying is precisely the art of looking toward the horizon, thinking where I want to go but also enduring the fatigue of the journey, which is sometimes difficult. ... There are dark days, even days when we fail, even days when we fall ... but always think of this: Don't be afraid of failures. Don't be afraid of falling. What matters in the art of journeying isn't not falling but not staying down. Get up right away and continue going forward (Address to the Jesuit Students in Italy and Albania, June 7, 2019).

Within this context of faith as a journey, we can clearly understand the need for the request of the apostles even for us today. Faith in God has to be kept alive and active: there are certainly those moments when we are challenged by the circumstances of life and we seem to find no meaning in God, when God seems to be too distant, too silent, too unperturbed and unmoved by our cries and

wailings; those are times we need to remember that we are on a journey, and if we must arrive, we have to keep moving at whatever pace our ability allows.

Persevering Patience or Active Patience: Persevering or active patience is the act of holding on (to the feet of Jesus on the Cross) when all about you seem to be crashing down. When your faith is tested, then is the time of persevering patience or active patience. For patience is a basic ingredient of faith. A man or woman who cannot wait cannot say he/she has faith. This is the core of the message of Habakkuk in the First Reading (Habakkuk 1: 2-3, 2: 2-4), the prophet of God, who wailed and lamented over the oppression and injustice, outrage and violence, and the flourishing of discord among his people; but God seemed not to care. He was silent for a long time. But at last, the word of God came to the man of God: "Write the vision down, inscribe it on a tablet to be easily read, since this vision is for its own time only: eager for its fulfilment, it does not deceive; if it comes slowly, wait, for come it will, without fail" (Habakkuk 2: 2-3). The demand for the fulfilment of the prophesy was to wait for the right time – "for this vision is for its own time only." We cannot hasten the footsteps of God.

We Are Merely Stewards: Jesus tells a parable to demonstrate We are merely servants; we have done no more than our duty": At first glance this may sound a bit harsh, if not uncharitable. But what Jesus is drawing our attention to is the fact that God has enormously blessed us and entrusted us with so many, and in fact, everything we have. In this sense, we are servants and stewards "trusted to look after something precious" as St. Paul tells us in the Second Reading (1 Timothy 1: 6-8, 13-14). To this extent, we cannot hold God in debt. instead, in return we are expected to know, love, and serve God in obedience and fidelity. This is the much we can do and have been trying to do. We can never do enough, talk less of doing too much for God, so that we think we deserve, as a right, to be rewarded by God. Jesus, by this parable, is teaching us some lesson in humility, contentment, patience, and delayed gratification. When we have done our parts, God will certainly do His part at the right time.

My dear friends, we need faith in God and in Christ for our salvation. Faith is more than intellectual acceptance of a body of doctrine and observance of moral and religious norms; it is a continuous response to God's constant call, a daily self-giving in the desire for knowledge, intimacy, and service of God in Christ through our neighbours. Faith is a courageous life of coherent, consistent life of witnessing in all circumstances of our lives. May the grace of God be sufficient for us now and forever.