

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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Today's gospel lesson begins with the apostles coming to Jesus and ask him for an increase of faith – why? Because they'd been disciples long enough to start to realize that they weren't very good disciples.

- By this point they had been traveling with Jesus for **more than a year: living** with him, **hearing** him preach, **watching** him perform miracles and change people's lives.
- But they still didn't **understand** many things that Jesus said.
- They still couldn't **help** people as much as Jesus did.

This is a familiar place for all of us.

- After we've begun to follow Jesus, we can tell in our **hearts** that we are **capable** of doing much **more**, that we were **made** for **greater things**.
- The good news is that this sense comes from the gift of faith already at work within us.
- Faith is a seed planted at our baptism, and as it grows, we're lifted up out of the small, narrow world we live in and connects us to the power and mystery of God.
- So instead of getting discouraged, like the disciples we need to simply go to Jesus ask him to grow that faith within us.

The Bible gives us lots of examples of how faith transforms our lives and we have a great one in today's first reading from the prophet Habakkuk.

- It begins with Habakkuk crying out to God, "How long, O Lord?"
- "Why don't you hear me? Why won't you save me?"
- This couldn't be more universal – he could be any of us, at any time or place.

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But specifically, Habakkuk lived in the 6th century BC, when Israel had been conquered by the Babylonians and the majority of the Jews had been deported.

- They laid waste to everything – Jerusalem, the temple, the entire country – and Habakkuk is right in the middle of it, surrounded by corpses, and burned and barren land.
- So he turns to God and God answers him, revealing a lot about faith.

First of all, Habakkuk reminds us that a strong faith doesn't mean that we won't ever suffer and be confused; faith doesn't take away our crosses.

- But faith *does* show where to turn: to God, our all-wise, all-powerful, and all-loving Father.
- The Creator of the universe is inviting us to a greater, higher context and share in the mystery of his own divine wisdom.
- And as we accept that invitation, we're freed from the cramped confines of what we can see and know on our own to wait with a greater patience on a richer vision that encompasses the entire length, height, breadth, and depth of Creation.

When God answers Habakkuk he promises to act and restore the fortunes of Israel – even if doesn't give all the details and implies that it might take longer than Habakkuk would like.

This is really important for us to notice for several reasons.

- One is that living in faith means learning and accepting that God's will and his plan for salvation unfold on his timetable – not ours.
- Another is that he doesn't want us to start thinking that he owes us an explanation for every little thing – he doesn't and that's contrary to growing in our ability to love and trust him.

Finally, God wants us to be able to respond in faith, so in his mercy, he only shows us what we need to know.

- Reflecting just on my own experiences, if God would have laid out anything more than the next step, I would have had even more trouble doing it.

So the gift of faith isn't some sort of superficial, "look-on-the-bright-side" philosophy – that's too weak and superficial for real life.

- Faith is the freedom from earthly influences; whether riches or poverty, health or sickness, success or failure, approval or disdain, none of it will keep God's divine life from flowing into the world through me.
- Faith is the power to persevere through any difficulty, and even find peace in the midst of it, knowing that we are in the hands of a Father, who "can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine," as St Paul tells us.

Of course, when God *does* more than we can ask or imagine, it often *demand*s more than we would have offered or expected.

- So just like Habakkuk, what are the things you see that cause your faith to waver?
- Just like the disciples, what in your life gives you pause and reminds you that you need help?

Think and pray about these things, and then, like apostles, take them directly to Jesus.

- Faith is our connection to God, a relationship that grows through our encounters with the Living God.
- It's why we hear Paul telling Timothy that he's not ashamed to suffer for the gospel because he *knows* whom he has *believed*.

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Since the heart of what we're asking for is to know God more, don't wait until you're confronted by a lack of faith – ask for your faith to be strengthened frequently.

- Any time you pray or read the Bible, you can begin with, “Lord, increase my faith.”
- Pray it at Mass; before each lesson, during the Eucharistic Prayer, when you're receiving Communion.
- Find some triggers in your daily life *outside* of prayer, like when you brush your teeth, climb some stairs, or get in a car.

Faith is a seed that God has already planted in us, and he delights in growing it in our hearts.

- So ask frequently, boldly, and with confidence so that its roots can reach deep and we can begin to taste its fruit in our lives.