

Twenty-seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle C

*Let us pray:*

**O gracious Lord, you gather us in to be your people.**

**We have come together**

**from different places and circumstances.**

**Some of us come weary or troubled or just plain frazzled.**

**But we are here, Lord, to be open to your presence,**

**your love, your power in our lives.**

**Strengthen us; inspire us to be your loving people.**

**Let the seed of faith grow within us**

**making us grateful servants of your Word.**

**All that we are and all that we have is a gift from you.**

**If today we hear God's voice, let us harden not our hearts.**

**Let us sing to the Lord joyfully,**

**coming into his presence with thanksgiving.**

**Let us bow down in worship before the Lord who made us.**

**He is our God and we are the flock he shepherds.**

**If today we hear God's voice, let us harden not our hearts. (Psalm 95)**

**Our readings this week are about faith, service and gratitude.**

**How are these words related do you think?**

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading --- Habakkuk 1:2-3; 2:2-4**

**Have you ever felt like Habakkuk?**

**What meaning do you find in his words here?**

**From *Celebration*, October 2004:**

**If scholars are right, Habakkuk might have been a contemporary of Jeremiah. He is probably here lamenting the destruction of Judah by King Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian army. He is probably also lamenting the corruption that took place in Judah before the fall. Yet, he is told that he must trust in a vision that can yet come to be. With this vision comes an assurance of God's love and care even though there is destruction and suffering. He told to write down this vision; in other words to make it permanent. And, it is to be in large, legible letters so that all the people may see it, read it, hold on to it – *a public display of faith in the midst of tragedy*. This is faith that gives life.**

From Reginald Fuller, “Scripture in Depth,” [liturgy.slu.edu](http://liturgy.slu.edu):

The last line of today’s reading is quoted twice by Paul (Romans 1:17 & Galatians 3:11) and seems to have helped him in understanding faith as the gift that ‘justifies us’ or saves us. This faith is the steadfast loyalty that helps us hold on in the midst of adversity.

From *Exploring the Sunday Readings*, October, 2007:

Have you ever met someone with vision? What do we mean when we use that word in that way? Part of the ‘vision thing’ is to be able to see farther down the road than the rest of us. It also means perhaps that this person with vision can see the ‘big picture’ – how things go together and what the focus should be. Most importantly this idea also means a person who has a creative instinct for the future. Tomorrow does not have to be a rerun of yesterday. *Visionaries imagine what doesn’t yet exist, but perhaps should.* Without such visionary thinking, hope can come to a standstill along with our faith and loving actions.

2<sup>nd</sup> Reading – 2 Timothy 1: 6-8, 13-14

This letter is part of the Pastoral Letters including 1 Timothy and Titus. They are *pseudonymous writing* which means the author is writing *as if he is the Apostle Paul*. He is probably a dedicated follower of Paul who wishes to preserve the great apostle’s thoughts and teachings applying them to the changing times and circumstances of the church in the early part of the second century. By the time of this writing many have given their lives for the faith in Christ; others have endured increasing difficulties and hardships. (Some have also fallen away or fallen into heresy –see 1:15, 2:17-18 and 4:9) He wants to use the example of Paul’s imprisonment and suffering along with some of perhaps Paul’s own words to encourage others to use their faith to live with courage, power, love and self control. (*Celebration*, October 2004)

What do you find most inspiring in this passage?

From *Exploring the Sunday Readings*, October, 2007:

*Fear is not the stuff of Christian living; love is.* We are realists; we know that life, even the life of a Christian can and will have difficulties. But God provides us a gift of his Spirit that will enable us to act with courage and power and love despite our fears.

**From *Celebration*, October 2001:**

**We need to “guard this rich trust with the help of the Holy Spirit that dwells within us.” The Greek word that is used for this ‘rich trust’ is a word that means something very precious like jewels and other valuables. Our faith must be guarded in all its integrity so that false ideas and misleading teachings will not alter or detract from it. Yet, as such guardians we are not to merely *preserve* a list of beliefs but to bear witness to that faith in our lives. The flame of faith must continually be fanned into flame so we can be enlightened as to how to live and respond in the present circumstances.**

***The Gospel – Luke 17: 5-10***

***What do you see of importance in this reading?***

***What meaning do you see in the idea of faith as a seed?***

**This passage sort of starts in the middle of things. Because the lectionary does not include the first part of this chapter, we do not understand why the disciples are asking for an increase in faith. Jesus had just warned them about not causing anyone to sin. In no uncertain terms Jesus tells them it would be better for the one who leads another into sin to have millstone around his neck and be thrown into the sea. Quite a vivid picture of the outcome of evil! He then goes on to say that they must be willing to forgive seven times a day. (Seven was the number symbolic of wholeness, completeness) It is no wonder that the poor disciples walking with Jesus toward Jerusalem would ask for a little more faith. But Jesus does not lessen the demands. Even a tiny bit of faith (a mustard seed) will be enough to uproot deeply rooted problems evil and hard-heartedness. (*Celebration*, October, 2004)**

**This whole chapter in Luke’s gospel is about “the decisiveness and urgency of discipleship.” We cannot just wait (or even pray) until we have enough faith, for then we may never begin living as the servants we are called to be. A seed is small, but it is filled with potential ‘power’ for growth. Jesus wants to convince us that our faith is like this. We must ‘burst open’ like a planted seed allowing growth and new life to begin. “We must use what we have.” Jesus then shows us what the faithful disciple looks like – one who not only works the fields, but also serves at table. In fact, as we put this all together we see that serving at table is as great as moving trees – and other more amazing feats of faith! Jesus like many good preachers of his time loved to use hyperbole and humor to get his point across. (*Living Liturgy*, Cycle C, p.220)**

*What do you think of the phrase “unprofitable servants”?*

The Greek adjective that is used here actually means “without need.” Although it is translated here as ‘unprofitable’ it seems to mean more that this servant is without the need for ‘pay.’ He is not motivated by reward or recompense. As servants of an all-merciful and loving God we need to do everything *with gratitude* that we have been called to serve such a ‘master.’ We are servants that are ‘due nothing,’ because all we have has been given to us with love.

(John Pilch, “Historical Cultural Context, [liturgy.slu.edu](http://liturgy.slu.edu))

And so, coming next week -- Luke’s Gospel follows immediately with the story of the 10 lepers who are cured. Here we see faith as the “simple, but profound act of the leper’s returning ‘to give thanks to God’ . . . Salvation is not freedom from disease,” but a grateful, and loving relationship with Jesus.

*Faith is a high-maintenance gift from God.* It must be tended, fed, tested, *and tried* in order to remain vital and viable. Have you ever tried to get a charcoal fire going? The coals must be arranged *just so* and then once started the fire must be fanned *just so* if the fire is to produce the heat to cook a meal for all to eat. If it is tended conscientiously, the glowing embers will even be around for roasting marshmallow for dessert! But if left unattended . . .

The life of a believer is a life lived *faithfully in overalls* – in steady performance of service. *Faith is* tending the lamp not knowing how long it will have to be lit. *Faith is* driving – or walking – steadily not always knowing how long the road will be. *Faith is* being like the faithful dog that follows his master with his tail up and wagging even when he is hungry and thirsty. But our faith journey luckily is not done alone. We learn faith and deepen our faith, not only by exercising it, but by reading scripture, opening ourselves in prayer to God’s Spirit, and perhaps, most of all, by being near people of faith, for faith is *beautifully contagious*. Faith even consists in the acceptance of doubts, in working through them, rather than repressing them. *It is our ability to endure insecurity without despair or complacency.* In all these things and ways God works. As Thomas Aquinas said “Faith is allowing God to work within us.” (*Celebration*, October, 2001, 2004)

*Let us pray:*

**Lord, tend our mustard-size seed of faith with your Holy Spirit.  
Let it grow and flourish in ways that lead to life and love.  
Give us the courage to uproot what is choking us.  
Give us the power to unclog what is making our lives meaningless.  
Give us the self-control to live with the faith you have given us  
despite the hardships and sufferings and dullness of our lives.  
Holy Spirit, light your fire within us.  
Stir us into flame so that we may be your light for others.**

**With St. Francis we pray:**

*Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.  
Where there is doubt, faith.  
Where there is despair, hope.  
Where there is darkness, light.  
And where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Master,*

*grant that I may not so much seek  
to be consoled, as to console.  
To be understood, as to understand.  
To be loved, as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive.  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.  
And it is in dying that we are  
born to eternal life.*

*Amen.*