

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ord. Time C/2013

The readings of this Sunday talk about the importance of faith. They invite us to grow in faith and to put ourselves at the service of the Lord.

The first reading describes the complaint of Israel to God after their country was besieged by the enemy forces. It invites the people to hope in the Lord and to trust his promise to save them in spite of the misfortune in which they are. It reminds them that it is only by keeping faith in God that they can live.

What is behind this text is the idea that despair and hopelessness are contrary to the attitude of faith. Another idea is the truth that whatever might be the extent of the suffering of the people of God, God who is faithful to his promise, will end up by saving them. For that reason, the people of God should be perseverant and trusting in God.

All that helps us understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus reminds us of the importance of growing in faith. First of all, the Gospel starts with the request of the apostles to Jesus to increase their faith. As a reaction, Jesus declares that if their faith was the size of mustard seed, they would transplant mountains.

Then he pursued with a comparison-statement between a master and his servant. In the comparison, Jesus says that any servant coming from farming work would never be invited by his master to sit down and eat before he had fulfilled his duty of waiting on his master.

It is only when his master would have eaten and drunk that the servant would have his turn to eat and drink. Even in this case, the master would never be grateful to the servant because he has done what he has commanded him.

In the same way, when the apostles would have fulfilled their duty, they would have to consider themselves as unprofitable servants who have done what they were obliged to do.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The point I want to bring today is the power of making the impossible possible. In fact, in life there are two types of things, namely those we can do or achieve and those we cannot do or achieve. Those we can do or achieve, we call them possible and those we cannot we call them impossible. There are certainly reasons why we can achieve some things or cannot achieve some others. But, that is not the point we are dealing with today.

According to today's Gospel, those things which, humanly speaking, are impossible to achieve can be achieved through faith. Why? Because, on the supernatural level, the one who acts through faith is not alone in his action. He has God with him who acts through him and makes the impossible possible. That is why Jesus says that if we have faith as small as a grain of mustard, we can command a mulberry tree to uproot and it will obey us and go into the sea.

However, we have to be careful. In fact, by referring to faith that uproots the big mulberry tree, Jesus is not calling us to use faith in order to force God to do whatever we want. Faith, indeed, is not a means to be used in order to obtain at cheap cost all kinds of things we want. Faith does not even move any material object as a magnet does.

What Jesus wants to tell us is that faith is capable of achieving what looks impossible to human eyes. It can bring quite unexpected things to happen to us. It can find solutions for the situations that appear totally and definitely out of human control.

As human experience has taught us, when there is nothing else to expect or when people are tired of having fought for so long without result, then, in a very surprising way, God can change everything for the best.

On a natural level, this is already something true. For instance, the psychology of observation has shown that when people approach things with faith and confidence, what they believe can really happen to them.

This is true in the domains like sports, work or the sciences. Again, human experience has shown that many scientific discoveries and inventions have been achieved by people who believed against any prediction that they could make it. In the same way, many athletes have achieved victories because they did not doubt one instance that it could happen to them. That is why we must always remember that nothing is difficult for us when we approach it with faith in God. We must always remember that we are not confronting difficulties of life alone, but with God and all his power.

However, whatever might be the size of our faith, we cannot claim any reward from God because of that. Once we have fulfilled duties because they have been required by our faith, we have done only what we should do.

In truth, God does not owe us anything because we have faith in him. What we receive from him is pure grace for which we have to be thankful to him. In the same way, what we do in the name of our faith is just what we should do. When we understand this truth, we become people who act freely beyond any pursuit of self-interest and reward.

That is the mystery of Jesus' Kingdom, namely that we gratefully do our duty; we are useless servants who hope for God's graciousness. Love functions also in the same way. In fact, when we love, we do a lot of things, just because of love. Once we have done them, there is no claim to raise. We have done only what we should do in our love. We have done what love has compelled us to do.

This is how we accept many sacrifices for our children. And, no parent gives the best of himself for his children for a given interest he wants to reap. On the contrary, he acts so because that is his duty. With all that in mind, we understand why Jesus says that when we have done all he has commanded, we have to remember that we are unprofitable servants who have done what we were obliged to do.

Let us pray, then, that in the midst of crises and challenges of life, God may increase our faith in him. Let ask him to help us grow in the understanding that we have to fulfill our duties out of love and not out of self interest. May God bless you all!

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



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