

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2016

The readings of this Sunday talk about the importance of faith. They show that faith is a gift of God which has to grow in us along the journey of life. They invite us to firmly trust God in everything in spite of the ups and downs of life.

The first reading describes, through the mouth of the prophet Habakkuk, the cry of the people of Israel in suffering. It highlights in particular the deep questions of the sons of Israel to God as their country was going under violence, destruction and ruin. It also gives the response of God in terms of an invitation to trust him and keep faith in him, which eventually will save the just one.

What is behind this text is the idea that sufferings and misery are enemies of faith. There is also the idea that whoever remains faithful to God in spite of the human suffering will be saved. The last idea is related to the truth that God does not disappoint those who trust him because what he has promised will be fulfilled as announced.

All that helps understand what is at stake in today's Gospel. First of all, the Gospel starts with the request of the disciples that Jesus increase their faith. Then, it gives the reaction of Jesus affirming that if they had faith as small as the grain of mustard, they would command even the trees and those would obey them.

After that, Jesus gives an example where he shows that a servant who is fulfilling his duty cannot expect to be praised by his master because of it. Finally, the Gospel ends with Jesus' statement that the disciples are unprofitable servants who do what is recommended of them.

What do we learn from today's Gospel? Today, I want to talk about the gift of faith. What do I mean by that? Let me explain. In fact, most of us have been baptized, have received first communion and, very likely, have received the sacrament of confirmation. In other words, all of us have had access to the same source and content of faith, where we have been taught that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

However, in spite of having the same source of faith, our ways to come to it have been different. Some of us have received faith, as a heritage through family. Others have received it by the intermediary of a friend, a relative or a spouse, etc. Still others have received it through their personal effort and search.

Such a description shows that faith has two dimensions, namely objective and subjective. Faith as objective has to do with its content to which we have access when we believe. Faith as subjective has to do with the journey that has led us to Jesus Christ.

That journey is not static, but moving along the course of life. As such, it is affected by the circumstances of life and subjected to the ups and downs of life. That is why sometimes, we hear people say, "That one has lost faith" or "He does not believe anymore", etc. In other words, difficulties and challenges of life can shake our faith. For that reason, faith, as a gift from God, is always perfectible, that is capable of improvement.

In fact, when the disciples ask Jesus to increase their faith, they show that its demands are so compelling that if they do not change, they cannot make it. Therefore, they need a more mature faith in order to enter the spirit of Jesus and comply with his demands.

Faith, as God's gift, is a powerful force that can make the impossible become possible. That is why Jesus says that if you have faith as small as a grain of mustard, you can uproot big trees and change the world. By referring to faith that uproots the big tree, Jesus is not calling us to use faith in order to force God to do whatever we like or want.

In fact, faith cannot be used in order to obtain at cheap cost whatever we want. Faith does not even move a material object as a magnet does. What Jesus wants to say is that faith is capable of achieving what looks impossible to human eyes. It finds solutions for situations that appear totally out of control. When there is nothing else to do or to expect, faith can change all that in a very surprising way.

As Psychology of observation has shown, when people approach things with faith and confidence, what they believe can really happen to them. We have seen it many times in sports and diverse fields of work, like scientific researches or inventions. That is why we must remember that no task is too difficult for us when we approach it with faith in God. We must remember that we are not confronting the difficulties of life alone, but with God and all his power.

However, whatever might be the size of our faith or its depth, we cannot claim any reward from God because we have it. When we have fulfilled many duties because they have been required by our faith, we have done only what we should do. In truth, God owes us nothing, because we have faith in him. What we receive from him is pure grace and gift for which we have to be happy and thankful to him.

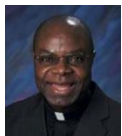
In the same way, what we do in the name of our faith is just what we should do, because it is so. When we understand this truth, we become free men and women who act freely by doing good things beyond a pursuit of interest and reward. When we have done our best, we have only done our duty. And those who have done their duty have done only what, in any event, they could be compelled to do.

That is the mystery of Jesus' Kingdom, namely that we gratefully do our duty. We are useless servants. That is also the law of love. When we love, we do a lot of things that love dictates us. After we have done them, there is no claim to praise. We have done only what we should do in our love. We have done what love has compelled us to do.

Is not that true also for the bringing up of our children? Because we love them, we joyfully accept sacrifices for them. All that helps to understand why Jesus says, "When you have done all you have been commanded, say "We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do".

Let us pray the Father to give us a bold faith amid the crises and the challenges of life. Let us ask Jesus to help us grow in the understanding that we have to fulfill our duties out of love and not out of interest. May God bless you all!

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



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