

Homily of Twenty Seventh-Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

Prophet Habakkuk prophesied in Judah about 600 years before Jesus Christ. At that time, there were political decadence and abandonment of worship of Yahweh. The first reading was a section of Habakkuk's lamentation over the state of affairs in Judah. Habakkuk questioned God about his silence over his and the people's cry and lamentation: "How long, O Lord? I cry for help but you do not listen! I cry out to you, 'Violence!' But you do not intervene. Why do you let me see ruin; why must I look at misery? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and clamorous discord." Habakkuk 1:4 which is not included in the reading says, "This is why the law is numb and justice never comes, for the wicked surround the just; this is why justice comes forth perverted."

There are people whose condition is as Judah was, and like Habakkuk, in their grief and desolation, they ask God many questions: "Why me?" "Why this?" "Why that?" "Where are you, God?" "Where are your promises." And many other questions. Some people argue that it is not proper to ask God questions. If that is the case, then the Scripture is full of improper questions to God. My understanding is that questions addressed to God with faith are prayers in themselves. Improper questions to God are questions asked doubtfully and without faith. God always answers questions to him with faith. When we claim that God is silent, we need to examine our faith. God speaks to us through Prophet Isaiah, "No, the hand of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. Rather, it is your crimes that separate you from your God. It is your sins that make him hide his face so that he does not hear you" (Isaiah 59:1-2). We can put verse two this way, "Rather, it is your [lack of faith] that separate you from your God. It is your [faithlessness] that make him hide his face so that he does not hear you."

Because Habakkuk asked with faith, God responded, "Write down the vision clearly upon the tablets, so that one can read it readily. For the vision still has its time, presses on to fulfilment, and will not disappoint. If it delays, wait for it, it will surely come, it will not be late. ... The just one, because of his faith, shall live." In other words, God's plans will surely come to fulfilment. God will not disappoint. Even if he delays, let us trust him faithfully. Our faith will save us.

St. Paul in the second reading encourages us not to lose our faith. He says, "Beloved: I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control... Take as your norm the sound words that you heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard this rich trust with the help of the Holy Spirit that dwells in us." In this passage St. Paul spells out some of the fruits of faith, "power, love, and self-control."

The Gospel: "The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith.' The Lord replied, 'If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it would obey you.'" It is not surprising that the apostles made this request. They had seen Jesus' miraculous deeds and the authority in his teaching, which they would have compared to their lack of faith. We are like the apostles; we lack faith. This is seen in our lukewarm or lifeless practice of our Christianity. St. Paul calls our attitude 'spirit of cowardice.' St. Paul encourages us to stir and fan our faith into flame.

Yes, our faith in God will be tested as that of the selfless (unprofitable), hardworking, and obedient servant Jesus alluded in the Gospel. He remained faithful and went the extra-mile to do all his master's will. The victory over this world is our faith (1 John 5:4). St. Paul says in Roman 14:23, "For whatever is not from faith is sin." And Jesus bade some persons farewell with the following words: "Your faith has saved you; go in peace," to the sinful woman (Luke 7:50). "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering," to the woman healed of hemorrhage (Mark 5:34). "Go, your faith has healed you," to blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:52). May Jesus greet us with such words as above. Amen.

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