

27th Sunday in Ordinary time, Cycle C

1st Reading: *Habakkuk 1:2-3; 2:2-4*

Intro: Pay attention to the last line. Notice God's answer to the question put to him: "the just one, because of his faith, shall live" (Is this, the "justified" person shall live?) The NABRE says: the faithful survive the impending doom because they trust in God's justice and wait patiently for God to carry it out. Several New Testament passages cite these words (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; cf. Heb 10:38) to confirm the teaching that people receive justification and supernatural life through faith in Christ. This is our connection to today's Gospel.

2nd Reading: *2 Timothy 1:6-8; 13-14*

Intro: In this selection, too, pay attention to what is found at the end. Remember, Paul is encouraging Timothy who is young and has been placed in charge of the community at Ephesus. As he deals with his own insecurity and the challenges of that community, he is reminded by Paul to depend on his faith and love in Christ and to utilize the help of the Holy Spirit.

Gospel: *Luke 17:5-10*

We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do... Lk 17:10c

It is not clear, in this Gospel selection, why the Apostles asked Jesus to increase their faith. Their request comes after Jesus has been talking about temptation, leading others to sin and forgiveness. Why the Apostles asked for faith, at this point, isn't immediately apparent, if at all. Maybe it was because they have been hearing so many instructions on how to act that they knew they would need faith to carry them out. Or, maybe, this is just a section containing collected teachings of the Lord.

There are similar sayings elsewhere. In Matthew 17: 20 Jesus tells the disciples that they couldn't drive out the demon because of their lack of faith. In Matthew 21:21 Jesus tells us that whatever we ask for in prayer, with faith, we will receive. Mark 11:22-23 tells us to have faith in God... and if we believe what we say will happen, it will be done for us. All of these sayings seem to be about what we can accomplish with faith in God.¹

The following section on the servant, reminds us that faith is not about replanting mulberry bushes in the ocean or throwing mountains into the sea. I distinctly remember, though, that when I was a kid, I thought it would be really cool to be able to do that. Nevertheless, what faith gives us is the ability to extraordinary things in service to the kingdom.

The master/servant story reminds me of a friend who owns his own business. He had an employee who, after being there a year, asked him for a raise. His reasoning was that he had done everything he was asked to do, had been there for a year and, therefore, deserved a raise. My friend didn't agree. He, like Jesus, expected his employees to think for themselves and become aware of what needed to be done

¹ The Jerome Biblical Commentary points out that the juxtaposition of these sayings on faith and servanthood remind us of the discussions of justification by faith or works. Remember, we are justified by faith but our faith is acted out in works (James 2:14-26).

without being told. If they came up with things to do that would make the business more profitable, even better.

The employee who asked for a raise is what we call a minimalist. A minimalist is one who does what has to be done but goes no further than that. I was taught, in the pre-Vatican II Church to be a spiritual minimalist. If they were trying to teach that way, or not, that is what I learned; don't break the Commandments. My guess is that Jesus originally told this parable to counteract the sometimes practice of the Pharisees of slavishly following the Law but emphasizing those aspects which restrict our actions rather than those which call of to action for the good.

We can act similarly today. When I was young, we had little books called "An Examination of Conscience," to help us prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It was a list of sins ordered according to the Ten Commandments. Our job was to determine which sins we had committed, estimate how many times we did it and confess it. It was completely backward looking and didn't call us beyond avoiding the sins that were listed. Nowhere did we look to the future and ask how God wanted us to grow. That said, I also recognize that many of us strove for greater holiness but the emphasis, at least for me, was simply to stop sinning.

I remember being taught about sins of omission, but I don't remember any specificity as to what a sin of omission was. My not remembering might be my own fault but that lack of specificity seems common today. My experience in the confessional is that most people who confess sins of omission simply confess being sorry for whatever sins of omission they might have. Rarely, though, do people confess sins of omission. Even more rarely does anyone specify something like they saw someone in need but didn't help.

Jesus consistently teaches us to go beyond simply keeping the Commandments and the Law. He taught us the Great Commandment, love of God and neighbor (Mt 22:36-40). And He taught us that those were the same thing (Mt 25:31-46). And, He taught us that our neighbor includes the one who hates us and the one we hate (Lk 10:29-37). Jesus, our Master, set the goal pretty high. He goes way beyond simply observing the Commandment and the Mosaic Law. There is no minimalism in the Law of Love.

This Gospel opens up plenty of questions for us. First, are we even trying? Do we think we have reached a level that is good enough? Do we think the goal Jesus set for us is unrealistic in our modern world? Can we envision how the normal activities of our day-to-day lives can be accomplished as servants of He who is our Lord?

Reflection

"When you have done all you have been commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.'" Lk 17:10

Question:

What words or phrases grabbed your attention during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? (Why do you think they grabbed

your attention?) What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

Alternative:

Share about/Reflect upon your efforts to live the Great Commandment. When do you have opportunities to demonstrate the “love of neighbor” for which the Great Commandment calls us? How can you pay more attention to those opportunities?

Verse by Verse

Lk 17:5-6 | see Mt 17:14-20, Mt 21:18-22 & Mk 11:20-25

Lk 17:5 | The Greek is not clear as to whether this question is a request for faith or a request for more faith. Surely, though, it would have not been a request for faith in the full Christian sense, faith in the person of Jesus Christ, as the answer seems to suggest.

Lk 17:6 | Instead of being a comment on the amount of faith required, this could be a comment on the lack of faith of the disciples. It could be saying, “You don’t even have faith the size of a mustard seed...”

Lk 17:10 “we are unprofitable servants” | The Greek is literally “we are useless servants” spoken in humility. It simply means, “unworthy of praise”.