

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
2nd October 2022 - 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year C): 1st: Habakkuk 1:2-3,2:2. Psalm: 94:1-2,6-9. 2nd: 2 Timothy 1:6-8,13-14.

Gospel: Luke 17:5-10.

Everyone we talk to are very aware of the increasingly dangerous and difficult times we are in these days. All of us cannot but be affected by them, and so many questions are raised by all that in one way or another is going on. Even celebrating Harvest Thanksgiving this year poses questions after such a long dry summer. We know prices have risen, but shop shelves are not bare, we won't have to go hungry, though it will cost more. But many other questions arise in our minds: what really is going on?

Habakkuk, in our 1st reading is acutely aware of terrible wrongdoing around him, and has shouted 'oppression,' the cry for help of someone being assaulted, in mind or body. He writes in a time of oppression, injustice, tyranny, outrage and violence. He feels alone in a sea of injustice, and he cannot bear his sense of powerlessness in the face of it all.

In the Bible he is the first one to dare call God to account asking boldly "Why does the Lord allow injustice to triumph? Why when he punishes one oppressor does he replace him with someone worse? This is the problem of evil posed at international level, and Habakkuk's dismay is felt by many people today. Into this situation the prophet announces the message of God, but warns his readers to be patient and to persevere in faith.

The upright shall live by faith. Several themes emerge here; God's absolute trustworthiness: God's control of the universe; our inability to understand adequately the mysterious ways of God: our failure to fathom the mysteries of the universe and the colossal struggles of nature and politics: God's determination not to tolerate violence, begotten by pride.

The Psalm then tells us that God is utterly dependable. He is a rock. He is a shepherd. We need only listen to his voice. But how many harden their hearts? How many won't listen, and shut their ears to God's Word? We do live in time of many of no belief in God.

Paul, in the 2nd reading is in prison in Rome and facing execution, another desperate situation, but who nevertheless encourages Timothy to maintain his **sincere faith and stand firm in his beliefs.**

Timothy's task a daunting one, but God is with him in the power of the Holy Spirit. 'God's gift was not a spirit of timidity, but the Spirit of power, and love and self-control.'

The apostles in the Gospel ask the Lord '**Increase our faith,**' and in doing so reveal to Jesus an imperfect understanding. They think of faith as a matter of quantity. So Jesus offers insight through a typically colourful and humorous illustration. A seed-full of faith would provide power over a whole grown tree. With the smallest possible amount of faith we can achieve the impossible.

Having Faith is what counts. At the same time, the absurdity of the illustration – getting a tree to transplant itself into the sea – warns against taking the details literally. Jesus is not inviting his followers to become merely conjurers/magicians.

What he did was impress upon them that their **faith must be a living and active thing;** not just something learnt in childhood but never acted upon and so atrophied and dead. The simile which Jesus used of a grain of mustard seed, which we know to have been noted for its smallness and its phenomenal growth.

The seed may be small, but it is alive, full of potential growth and power and fruition. A seed is only a little thing. So is a speck of dust. But one is alive and the other is dead.

Many people are worried about their faith and would say with the apostles "increase our faith."

But they cannot expect God to pour faith into them as we may pour milk into a jug. What must be done is to examine the little faith they have got.

It may indeed be something very small. But the important thing is 'Is it dead or alive?'

Even the tiniest spark, then properly tended as Paul says, 'fan it into a flame.' Jesus is saying with the smallest possible amount of faith one can achieve the impossible, for **with God everything is possible.**

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