

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
7th August 2022 - 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year C): 1st: Wisdom 18:6-9. Psalm: 32(33). 2nd: Hebrews 11:1-2,8-19. **Gospel:** Luke 12:32-48.

Very encouraging words from Jesus today: “there is no need to be afraid little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom.”

We might sometimes take our faith for granted, so the scriptures set before us today ask us to think more deeply about how and what we believe. Our 2nd reading comes from a great chapter in Hebrews on heroes of faith

3 stories I read bits of this week may help us too. The first is a story of a young Christian family’s miraculous escape from Stalinist Russia with the Red Army at their heels. The Dutch/German family had migrated in the 18th century to Ukraine and settled in the Crimea. They survived the revolution of 1917 but with Stalin’s reign of terror as Christians they had to be ready to move out at any moment or face untold horrors. The story focuses on the mother and children of the family who keep their faith and escape with adventures against all the odds, until finally after 21 years, they were reunited in Canada with some of their family. They kept the faith through all the ups and downs faithfully.

Their uplifting story of courage and faith in God is of a pattern repeated throughout the ages, ever since the first Passover, which is what our 1st reading from Wisdom was about, with revolutions, wars and persecutions producing similar examples of the human spirit at its best.

2nd story is of the Desert Fathers who were monks and hermits living in the remote expanses of Egypt in the 4th century. They lived simply and had few possessions. People sought them out for practical advice about daily living, and spiritual wisdom about growing nearer to God.

One person John Colobus, stayed with a monk who planted a dry stick in the ground and told Colobus to water it every day. This, though, was desert and collecting the water took many hours of walking. Colobus persisted, and after three years the stick blossomed and bore fruit. The monk took it to the other monks ‘look, he said ‘the fruit of obedience.’

Simple dogged obedience, faithfulness and persistence: virtues that characterised the Desert Fathers. But in our bustling, impatient society, they’re scarce virtues that aren’t often sought or valued. However they are central to Jesus teaching about the Christian life.

3rd is about Francis Xavier Van Thuan, who was born into a prestigious Catholic family in Hue the capital of Vietnam. He felt called to priesthood and following ordination and further studies in Rome returned to Vietnam and taught in the Seminary, training future priests. Pope Paul VI nominated him bishop in the north of Saigon. Later he was named successor to the Archbishop of Saigon.

He was a clear choice and a popular pastor, but the appointment didn’t please everyone. The Communist authorities interpreted that move as opposition and he was placed under house arrest. Religious persecution in Vietnam became worse and he was sent to a ‘re-education camp.’ He remained there for the next 13 years, nine of which were spent in solitary confinement. On release after much pressure he was expelled from his native country, working then in the Vatican promoting peace and justice.

During his time in prison he was desperate to encourage his people not to be afraid and not to lose heart. He began to send them short but inspiring messages of faith, one thousand and one on total. These were smuggled out of his cell and collected into a book. Despite having had everything taken away from him, Van Thuan knew his captors couldn’t steal his faith. This was his strength and joy. (Wikipedia [link](#))

Profound yet simple faith in Jesus offered a light in the darkness. It was sure and certain guidance along the road of hope. One of his messages says: Christian faith is essentially about an unconditional acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord, combined with a real determination to live and die with hope in him.
Do not be afraid little flock.