

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time - C

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Habakkuk 1:2-3, 2:2-4a

Very little is known about the prophet Habakkuk. Even the meaning of his name is uncertain. From his writings some have deduced that he was a member, possibly a leader, of the temple choir. One might date his writings between the defeat of Neco by Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish (605 B.C.) and the siege of Jerusalem (597 B.C.). This places Habakkuk shortly after Nahum and makes him a contemporary of Jeremiah.

Our reading today is a curious mixture. In his book, Habakkuk poses two complaints to God and receives two answers. What we hear today is from the first complaint and the second answer. The first complaint is that there is no justice while the second complaint is about continued oppression.

1:2 How long, O LORD? I cry for help but you do not listen!

The anguish of a downtrodden people. Habakkuk finds the Lord's toleration of the wicked very difficult to understand. God's inactivity is intolerable.

I cry out to you, "Violence!"

This is a key word in Habakkuk and it refers to the violation of basic human rights which characterizes the confusion and anarchy of the times.

but you do not intervene. ³ 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.

These evils are best identified with oppression by foreigners.

2:2 Then the LORD answered me and said: Write down the vision Clearly upon the tablets, so that one can read it readily.

The Lord's words are not meant for Habakkuk's ears alone; the message is to be written down in letters so big that it can easily be read and at a later date checked to see if it is verified or not (See Isaiah 30:8).

³ For the vision still has its time, presses on to fulfillment, and will not disappoint; If it delays, wait for it, it will surely come, it will not be late.

The fulfillment of the vision shall take place at the moment determined by God (see Isaiah 55:10-11).

^{4a} The rash man has no integrity;

Literally, “Behold, inflated, not straight (just), is his throat (soul) within him.” The wicked man’s throat is inflated and distended by greed and this mirrors his soul which has been warped by pride.

but the just man, because of his faith, shall live.

In contrast, the just man trusts in God and not in his own ability to accumulate power and riches.

2nd Reading - 2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14

Having completed our study of 1st Timothy last week, we now start 2nd Timothy. As you will recall, Timothy is the pastor (bishop) at Ephesus. This second letter was written during Paul’s imprisonment in Rome shortly before his martyrdom in the year 67. This letter is, therefore, his last. Foreseeing his approaching end, Paul writes to his favorite disciple to give him final instruction and encouragement. He must not be ashamed of the gospel he tells him, nor of Paul, prisoner of Christ, for the gospel brings salvation, grace and light, and Paul is proud to be its messenger.

⁶ For this reason, I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands.

Imposition of hands was an ancient gesture that expressed solidarity between the one who imposed hands and the recipient; it implied the transmission of a benefit, of the transfer of a quality or function, from one person to another. In the New Testament, the gesture of imposing hands is mentioned in various contexts: as a gesture of blessing (Matthew 19:15), as a gesture of healing (Mark 6:5), as a rite used in conferring the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17), and as the means of conferring an ecclesiastical office (Acts 6:6). This is the sense which is used here – Timothy is Bishop of Ephesus. There is nothing said here that restricts charismatic gifts to the laying on of hands.

“Paul urges Timothy to nurture his spirit with eagerness of mind, rejoicing in his faith, just as he once rejoiced in the newness of his ordination.” [The Ambrosiaster (between A.D. 366-384), *Commentary on the Second Letter to Timothy*]

⁷ For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control.

See Romans 8:15. The Holy Spirit makes us bold. Recall Peter, who before Pentecost denied Christ three times and hid behind locked doors but on the day of Pentecost preached and converted 3,000.

⁸ So do not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord, nor of me, a prisoner for his sake; but bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God.

The testimony which Timothy is to offer includes both preaching and suffering. Christ did it, Paul did it, you are to do it.

¹³ Take as your norm

In his preaching and personal conduct, Timothy is to adhere to the truths he learned from Paul.

the sound words that you heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

A teaching that is wise, prudent, and compatible with reason. Paul is emphasizing that Christian teaching, while being transcendent, also accords with intellectual and moral soundness.

¹⁴ Guard this rich trust with the help of the holy Spirit that dwells within us.

God is able to preserve the entire content of Christian teaching (both written and oral).

“What is it ‘that you heard from me’? The faith, the preaching of the gospel. God, who committed this to us, will preserve it unimpaired. I suffer everything, that I may not be despoiled of this treasure. I am not ashamed of these things, so long as the faith is preserved uninjured.” [Saint John Chrysostom (between A.D. 393-397), *Homilies on the Second Epistle to Timothy* 2]

Gospel - Luke 17:5-10

In our readings during these weeks of Ordinary Time, we are accompanying Jesus as He journeys toward Jerusalem and His passion. The past six weeks have focused our attention on readings which pointed out the opposition to Jesus and His disciples. Luke now returns to the subject of renewal, focusing on the inward renewal of the disciples.

⁵ And the apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.”

To the apostle’s request for more faith, Jesus replies that it is the quality, rather than quantity, of faith that needs revitalizing.

⁶ 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.

A large tree with an extensive root system. It would be difficult not only to uproot this tree, but to grow it in seawater. Genuine faith can bring about quite unexpected results.

⁷ “Who among you would say to your servant who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, ‘Come here immediately and take your place at table’? ⁸ Would he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for me to eat. Put on your apron and wait on me while I eat and drink. You may eat and drink when I am finished’? ⁹ Is he grateful to that servant because he did what was commanded? ¹⁰ So should it be with you. When you have done all you have been commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.’”

This parable, which appears only in Luke, warns church leaders that they are servants of the people and of God. They can never stop and rest in the belief that they have worked enough. Luke's gospel is one of total dedication.

Notice the two sides to the coin presented by these two parables: With faith we can do anything, and we must continue to labor until the end. Salvation does not come by faith alone, but by how it is lived out.