

## 27<sup>th</sup>. Sunday in Ordinary Time

As a priest I do not have to look very far to see signs of encouragement and support. As I was putting these words together there were over twenty young children outside my window enthusiastically taking part in the kids' fun day. They were beginning to search out some of the wonderful imagery and mysteries found in Sacred Scripture. That this whole day was created and organised by our parishioners is a great source of encouragement to me.

Last Sunday some of you took up the invitation to go into the Cathedral to witness the moment when two of our seminarians, Olek and Anthony, were admitted as candidates for the priesthood. I am told that the Cathedral was full of people who wanted to show their support and encouragement to these young men.

Perhaps the most moving experience of support for us priests was to see the huge number of people who gathered on Monday evening and on Tuesday afternoon to celebrate the life and death of Fr. John Rate, the Parish priest of the Henley Beach Parish. Here was a man who had made such an impact on the lives of so many people because God chose him to be a priest and he had used all of his human and spiritual gifts to generously respond to that call.

In our gospel today we meet some people who were beginning to become discouraged. They had just heard Jesus say that his disciples were called to forgive others no matter how many times they had been offended. They felt that Jesus was asking too much of them. The apostles asked Jesus to increase their faith. It is the sort of prayer that you and I have probably prayed a thousand times when we realise that we cannot do what Jesus asks us on our own. I find myself praying that prayer when things get a bit messy. When I can't make sense of things that seem to be going wrong around me, I ask Jesus to increase my faith. When I am feeling anything like the writer of our reading today from Habakkuk I wonder if I have faith at all. He can't understand why God is ignoring him. "How long Lord, am I to cry for help, while you will not listen? Why do you look on where there is tyranny?"

Well God is listening to him, as he listens to you and me. But he tells Habakkuk that prayers are not always answered straight away. Don't give up on me. Don't think that I will not bring about what is just and right. "If it comes slowly wait, for come it will, without fail."

The response that Jesus made to his apostles when they asked for an increase of faith seems at first sight to be a bit harsh. He tells them that if they had faith the size of a mustard seed, they would be able to tell a huge mulberry

tree to jump into the sea. But we can hear those words in two quite different ways. It could sound as if Jesus is saying that they don't have any faith. But. I think it was rather a word of encouragement. I think Jesus was saying that they do have faith and no matter how small that faith may seem to them, it is enough. He wants us all to realise that faith is not about size, but about connection. Faith gets its power not from its size, but from its ability to connect us with Jesus. If we are connected with him, then there is nothing that we cannot do in his name.

I don't think that Jesus is into shifting trees from one place to another, but he is into shifting a lot of other things. He wants us to shift our understanding of how loved we are. He wants to shift our understanding of what is possible. I think he wants us to be a bit like the children at the Fun day and be willing to undo puzzles and search for where God may be in our lives and in the lives of those we love.

I think Paul has something to say about this today. He says to Timothy with a passion, "Fan into a flame the gift that God gave you when I laid my hands upon you. God's gift was not a spirit of timidity, but the Spirit of power and love and self-control." Can you and I hear Paul saying that to us too? Water was poured upon our heads when we were baptised and hands were laid upon

us when we were confirmed in our union with Jesus. We were given the gift of God's own Spirit of love not for our sake, but for the sake of those around us. As people of faith we are able to see something of where God already is and where He needs to be. As people of faith we can continue the work that Jesus has begun. As people of faith we know that we are connected people, connected with Jesus and connected with all those who share his life. As people of faith we know what it means to belong to a Church, a community that keeps learning how to be disciples of Jesus.

Perhaps it is with this understanding that we can hear Jesus speak to us today about being merely servants who do no more than our duty. Jesus is speaking here to his apostles, to the people who will take up leadership in his Church. He wants them to understand that they need to take on the heart and mind of their servant leader before they can act in his name. And so it is for us. To ask for an increase in faith is really asking to become more connected to the one who gives us the power to act in his name. Faith is not something that we can claim as our own. Faith is not something that we can boast about. Faith is pure gift from God. To ask for an increase in faith is to commit ourselves to a life of service in union with the one who gave up his life in love for us all.