

27th. Sunday in Ordinary Time

There are a few gospel passages that I immediately associate with a particular person. When I read today's gospel I think of one of the priests who taught me in the seminary over fifty years ago. Fr. Joe Zagami taught us Italian and some canon law. He was not a great teacher. I don't remember much about what he taught me, but I remember going to Confession to him one day and he asked me to pray with this particular gospel. I was not expecting that. But as I prayed with the gospel, I came to understand that Fr. Joe himself lived by this gospel. He saw himself as no more than a humble servant. His humility had a deep impression upon me. He understood that what he was called to do, he could only do by the power of God working in him with all his limitations.

Our gospel comes just after the disciples heard Jesus say that they were called to forgive others no matter how many times they had been offended. 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 to do 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. See how he flags, he whose soul is not at rights, but the upright one will live by his faithfulness."

The response that Jesus made to his apostles in today's gospel, seems a bit harsh. He seems to say that they don't have any faith. 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. Jesus exaggerates things at times to make his point. 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 really 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 Paul has something to say about what is possible for his co-worker Timothy. 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.