

27TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, C CYCLE OCTOBER 2, 2016

1st Reading: Habakkuk 1:2-3; 2:2-4 [The vision still has its time]

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 95 🎵 If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts. 🎵

2nd Reading: 2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14 [Bear your share of the hardship that comes with the Gospel]

Gospel: Luke 17:5-10 [We are merely servants who deserve no credit]

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."

Jesus replied, "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

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'?
Would you not rather say, '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'?
Are you grateful to that servant for doing what was commanded?

So should it be with all of you. When you have done all you have been commanded, say,
'We are unprofitable servants; we have only done what we were obliged to do.' "

(Luke 17:5-10)



🎵 We walk by faith, and not by sight: No gracious words we hear
Of him who spoke as none e'er spoke, but we believe him near.

We may not touch his hands and side, Nor follow where he trod;
Yet in his promise we rejoice And cry "My Lord and God!" 🎵

That's the song that I heard in my heart when I prayed over this *Gospel*. But I really hate the end of that passage, I don't want to be an "*unprofitable servant*." Still, it's a description that is meant to wake us up - to make us think about who we are called to be as disciples of Jesus.

My discomfort led me to look up other translations of the *Greek* word that describes the servant in the parable, and came up with some that were even worse: "unworthy servants," "worthless slaves," "undeserving servants," "idle slaves." Some were a little less condemning, like "ordinary servants" but the best I could find that fit the context and the whole message of the *Gospel* was "merely servants who deserve no credit."

It is still difficult to work hard and not ask for credit, but the real message of this parable, and the preaching of Jesus and Paul is in the song:

We walk by faith, everything is a gift, We are powerless to earn our salvation.

We are children of grace, or we are not God's children. Let me say that again:

We are children of grace, or we are not God's children.



This parable goes against almost everything our culture teaches us. We are expected to make it on our own, to earn what we receive, to work hard so we can deserve a good salary. But Jesus is saying that we are called to care for each other, by feeding others with both physical and spiritual food and to work in the fields - to go out and spread the *Good News*, the *Gospel*.

That's the hidden meaning of the servant who comes in from the field, and then prepares the supper. That is what the community Luke is writing to would hear - the call to care for brothers & sisters in the church and to spread the good news to the world.

That is the work of following the *Gospel* of Christ. But like that servant, we can't take credit for that work - whether it is within the Church or in the world.

Even our ability to work is a gift from God.

The parable says that we have only done what we have been commanded to do when we live the values of Christ, when we live the vision of the gospel.

So, what have we been commanded to do? The rest of the Gospel of Luke, and the whole New Testament, give us a vision of how God calls us to live.

Forgiveness & mercy are at the core of that vision, as well as compassion & love, peace and non-violent resistance to evil. That is where the vision revealed by the life and words of Jesus conflicts with the expectations and behavior of so much of our culture.

Instead of forgiveness and mercy, too many shout for retribution, revenge and resentment. Instead of compassion and love, we hear words of condemnation and see examples of hatred. Instead of peace and non-violent resistance to evil, we see bullying, violent words & actions, and declarations of war.

And we are too often told something like, *"that's the way the world is."* I remember an episode of the TV show, *Leverage*, when someone who was being oppressed said those words "That's the way the world is" & said them in despair. The answer she was given was one expression of the vision of Jesus, *"Then, change the world."*

But how is that possible? That's where the beginning of the passage we heard comes in. We change the world through faith. Not just faith in what I want to happen, but faith that is in tune with the vision of the Gospel and the mission of God's Kingdom. Faith that is trust in the love of God and readiness to follow the call of Christ. In our world today, we often have faith in science, or in our own resources, but that is not enough. Sometimes we put our faith in our past mistakes and feel doomed to failure. Sometimes we give in to worry, forgetting that to worry is to put my faith in what I don't want to happen.

When I consider the call that comes to me as a disciple of Jesus, I often say (to myself first-, even before I say it to anyone else)

"I can't do everything I want to do, but I can do everything God wants me to do."

When I let the truth of that sink in, I come face to face with the question, "How do I *know* what God wants me to do?" The answer is grounded in a faith that removes fear, makes us free to discern what God wants and opens us to receive the grace to do it.

I remember a time when I was a young priest in Buffalo and was involved in a lot of things. The expectations of people seemed overwhelming, and they often conflicted. For example, I was expected to give a good homily, but not disturb too many people or make them late for the Bills game - that was the mortal sin.

And the worst expectations I experienced were the ones I had for myself. I expected myself to be Jesus Christ, Francis of Assisi and the whole mission impossible team, and of course I fell short.

When I took all that to prayer and asked the Lord, "What do *you* expect me to be & do?" I realized that a lot of the expectations I experienced did not come from God. I heard Jesus in my heart saying, *"I don't deal in expectations, I give you a call, and when I call you to do something, or to be someone, I send the Spirit so you have the power to respond to that call."*

Since then, I usually disregard expectations when they include the word "should", because those are most often not from God, and then I ask the Spirit, "What are you calling me to do or be today?" Then I count on the grace of God to set me free to live the Psalm response, "If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts."

I still need to do that every day, because I still struggle to separate expectations that are not from God from the call to follow the way of Christ in my everyday life. In a word, I still can "should" on myself.

Every call from God comes from divine love & gives us the courage to confront evil without despair & depression and to work for justice without responding to violence with more violence.

Faith in the love and truth of Jesus gives us the grace to live the words of Paul in the 2nd reading, *"bear your share of hardship for the Gospel with the strength that comes from God."*

It is faith that gives us the grace to believe these beautiful words adapted from the 1st reading:

"the vision of the Gospel still has its time, presses on to fulfillment and will not disappoint."

♪♪ Help then, O Lord, our unbelief And may our faith abound;
To call on you when you are near, And seek where you are found. ♪♪

