

Homily for October 7, 2001  
27th Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle C

By Father Charles Bowes

Habakkuk 1:2-3; 2:2-4  
2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14  
Luke 17:5-10

## *What we have of faith and life is enough and is a gift.*

The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.” No matter how many times I hear it, it’s just hard for me to believe that less is more. It seems so apparent that more is more, whether you’re talking about money or a plate full of food or the company of a friend. And though I experience the truth of that saying, the more money or time I have, the more I squander; and the more I eat the worse I feel, experience alone won’t lead me to relinquish my primary allegiance to more.

The apostles demonstrate the same weakness in the request they make of Jesus – “Increase our faith.” If faith is so important, they reason, more faith must be even better. If faith will get you to Friday, more faith will certainly get you to heaven. “We haven’t enough of it,” they say. “We can’t do anything as we are. We can’t even start. Please help us. We are very weak. We are beginners. You are so holy. We aren’t but we would like to be like you,”...and so it goes.

They are like the businessman who says he will start his business plans as soon as he has more money, or the farmer who says he needs more seed before he can sow his crop. Because they do not do anything, nothing gets done. But as every mystic and saint will tell you, the road to holiness leads through enough. Learning to accept what we have, to work with what we have, whatever it is, as sufficient, is a great spiritual lesson.

And what does Jesus do in the face of the protests for more? Does he give them more faith? Does he really pour it on? No. Of course not. He does not listen to their request. He does not promise them more faith. He does not pledge them anything at all. He just says, “Start with the little you have, and you will do all you want.”

He unmasked in them, and he unmask in us, one of the ways we use to escape our responsibilities. We can’t pray because we have insufficient faith. We can’t be charitable because we are very weak Christians. We can’t organize ourselves for justice because we are only beginners. We can’t stop drinking because we haven’t sufficient grace. We can’t possibly visit neighborhoods or talk about our faith even to a co-worker or a family

member because we just don't have enough of that faith. Jesus objected: "Don't kid yourselves. Don't speak like that. Don't even ask for more, but start with what you have!" In other words, even a little faith whatever it is, is enough – just enough to share because it's all God's gift and all God's doing, this enterprise of life and faith.

In fact, this is a lesson of the second part of this gospel: "Is (the master) grateful to that servant because he did what was commanded?" – Jesus' hard saying about the unworthy servant drives home the point that all life, all grace is gift. It's never earned. It is not a reward for service – this life, this faith – it can only be savored and received.

And on this RESPECT LIFE SUNDAY, it's good to remember that all is gift. And that the gift is enough to do what needs to be done. Who do we think we are anyway? Do we think God needs us? Whose life is it anyway? This was the title of a Hollywood movie that propagandized for euthanasia. The movie's answer was: my life is my own to do with as I will. But it is not; it is God's; life is only lent to us. – Like faith. We can't say even of a small portion of our life or our time, "This is my own." It is all God's. He gave it to us. We are stewards, servants. We have nothing of our own to bargain over against God. God said to Saint Theresa, "I am He who is and you are she who is not," meaning that our very existence is gift, by creating us. That same Saint Theresa said in return, "Everything is grace." Yes, everything is gift. All life, all faith.

Some years ago a woman died who many considered to be a living saint. Her name was Dorothy Day. She started all kinds of activities: newspaper, a Catholic Worker which still exists; houses of hospitality for vagrants that still function; feeding programs; Christian communal farms; and so on.

Many admirers came to visit her, to have a look at her, to cherish her, to speak to her, to touch her if possible. Sometimes they would tell her, "You are a saint," or she would overhear others saying of her, "She is a saint." She would get upset and turn to the speaker, and say, "Don't say that. Don't make it too easy for yourself. Don't escape this way. I know why you are saying, 'She is a saint.' You say that to convince yourself that you are different from me, that I am different from you. I am not a saint. I am like you. You could easily do what I do. You don't need any more than you have; get kicking, please." Amen.

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enough and is a gift.