

**27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)**  
**(Habakkuk 1:2-3; 2:2-4 / Luke 17:5-19)**  
**06.10.2013**

There is a fascination with the spectacular among many people in the Church. They long for miracles; they want to see marvellous things happening. They will flock to hear this or that speaker who has a reputation as a wonder-worker or healer. *Miracles do happen* as one book title puts it, but most often God works in discreet ways. Humility is His hallmark.

He works above all in and through the quiet and humble faithfulness of good servants. I have many such people in mind in saying that - people in whom I have seen Christ work simply, without fuss, without them drawing undue attention to themselves. Indeed, in this Eucharist with some of his family members I think of one such person around this time of his Month's Mind: I'm thinking of the late Fr Michael Browne of the Redemptorist community in Clonard, Belfast. He was a quiet, gentle servant of the Lord who simply went about his duty in the Master's service caring for those who came to him in the hope of having the Lord's mercy reflected to them.

What the Lord asks from us are not great spectacular things, marvellous displays or tremendous flurries. What the Lord asks of us is quiet and unassuming faithfulness: fidelity!

*The upright will live by their faithfulness.*

That is the bottom line of today's first reading from the prophet Habakkuk.

Let's just look at that little verse with which today's first reading ends, for it prepares us to enter into and grasp the teaching of the gospel passage given to us as God's word of life for us this Sunday.

What comes across in Habakkuk's statement is that the upright are not proud or arrogant; they certainly don't trust in their own strength alone, their own forcing power.

They are patient and humble.

They wait for the Lord with trust even as He delays in coming to manifest Himself.

Their attitude stands in contrast to that of the haughty and self-sufficient.

These think that they can make their own way in the world relying on their own strength.

I say this is how *they* think, but would it not be true to say that this is how *we* think at times!

Yes, there is always a danger for us to imagine that we are in control.

We can even misinterpret the encouragement given to us in today's gospel passage which is really a call to have absolute faith in God, thinking that this gospel passage gives us a power that isn't ours.

There are those who foolishly imagine they are being told to uproot trees and plant them in the sea, or, even more than that, to move mountains by their own strength.

While we mightn't have tried to uproot trees in our back garden as yet, most of us will have experienced the negative consequences of an overly self-reliant attitude in our lives.

We will have learned through our falls along the way that we cannot walk life's path alone.

We need to be relying on a power greater than our own to help and sustain us and see us through.

The prophet tells us that *the upright will live by their faithfulness*.

What he is saying to us there is that without God - without us recognising that we are called to see ourselves as radically dependent upon the Lord - we will never enjoy a healthy and meaningful life in true freedom of heart.

The paradox is that our true freedom depends upon us having a servant attitude of heart.

Until we grasp that we are the Lord's servants we will never attain the freedom to which God calls us.

What will happen instead is that we will become enslaved to something or someone.

This enslavement can take on multiple forms: it may be our work, our reputation, our appetite for power or wealth, our need to possess more and more things and/or people ... it may be an addiction or dependency of some kind (alcohol, drugs, sex, gambling) ... it could even be an unhealthy rapport with religious practice (a certain rigidity in this whole domain) ... or again a slavish attitude in regard to someone we make a god of in our lives ...

Ultimately, it is always to ourselves that we become enslaved.

We become enslaved to our own foolish ways, our super-ego, bolstered by whatever it is we replace God with in our lives.

All the things that ensnare us, or that we allow to take hold of us, are things we have recourse to in order to fill the empty space we feel inside - what some call *the hole in our soul*.

Ultimately, only God can fill that space.

Only the Lord can fulfil us.

To live in *faithfulness* is to be *full of faith in the Lord*.

So, to say that that *the upright will live by their faithfulness* is the equivalent of saying, *they will live by allowing the Lord to live in them*.

The apostle Paul - who before his conversion had been such a fanatical Jew (a religious addict, we could say - enslaved to religion's rules and regulations which he eventually came to see as being just *so much rubbish* cf. Philippians 3) - came to the point where he could say: *I live no longer I, but Christ lives in me*.

This recognition didn't leave Paul puffed up with pride, living under the impression that he was God Almighty. To the contrary! Paul's belief that Christ lived in him left him sure and certain that he was simply the Lord's servant. Again and again he refers to himself as *simply the Lord's servant*.

After all, Christ the Lord revealed Himself to us as a humble servant. He states clearly: *Behold I stand in your midst as one who serves*. He tells us that *He came into the world to serve and not to be served*.

He matched these words with his actions. Just think of His gesture at the Last Supper where he put on the apron of humility and stooped to wash His brothers' feet.

We know that ultimately what makes all of us live is love, but I wonder have we grasped just as well that *to love is to serve*.

I will never forget those words *to love is to serve* which first jumped off the page for me many years ago in a card I received from my late mother.

When we give ourselves in the loving service of the Lord and of other people, then what we discover is that we have been led into the most meaningful life ever.

To give our lives in service! This is what today's gospel passage really calls us to.

That's its bottom line.

The temptation for us is to want to stay with the opening section of this gospel passage seeing it as assuring us that we are somehow given miraculous powers if only we believe enough. I have heard this passage commented in such a way that what was advocated was that it challenges us by telling us that if only we believed in ourselves more, then we would do great things.

What rubbish!

To say that we should have greater belief in ourselves amounts to nothing more than advocacy of psychological auto-suggestion!

Note that Jesus doesn't talk about us having great faith, but small humble faith: *faith the size of a mustard grain* ... not faith the size of a mountain!

Let us be clear.

Faith and faithfulness are not about believing in oneself, but in the Lord.

The whole emphasis of the word of God addressed to us this morning is upon having a **humble faith in God** ... living in faithfulness ... which amounts to living in a radical dependence upon a power greater than ourselves: the Lord!

Let me draw to a conclusion by sharing with you these lines of an anonymous writer found in the Alcoholics Anonymous handbook *Twenty-Four Hours A Day*:

*The world doesn't need super men or super women, but super-natural people. People who will turn the self out of their lives and let Divine Power work through them ... Our chief ambition should be to be used by God ... God only needs instruments for His use. His instruments can remake the world.*

Bernadette Soubirous (Bernadette of Lourdes) could say of herself that she was just a broom that had been used by the Lord for His purpose and once the work was done the broom could be set aside, put behind the door out of sight.

There's an example of the attitude of a humble servant of the Lord: a reflection of the humble servant she encountered in Lourdes when she welcomed Mary to the grotto at Massabielle.

In saying what I have just said about Bernadette, I can see with my mind's eye the late Fr Michael Browne in his latter years, no longer presiding over the Eucharist at the High Altar in Clonard church, but concelebrating discreetly, hidden behind a pillar in the sanctuary.

May we all see ourselves as humble servants!

May we be strengthened to live our lives in the humble service of the Lord and our brothers and sisters!

May it be in the spirit of humble service that we all live our ministry to the world!