

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)  
(Habakkuk 1:2-3;2:2-4 / Luke 17:5-10)  
06.10.2019  
Lord, increase our faith

Dear brothers and sisters,

We are gathered together this morning because we believe in Jesus Christ. We have faith in Him. Sometimes our faith in the Lord Jesus is strong; sometimes our faith is weaker. When we praise the Lord and thank Him, it can happen that we get the impression that perhaps nobody is there to heed us. When we ask the Lord for his help, it can happen that it seems nobody is listening; certainly nobody is answering. So the disciples' prayer to Jesus heard in today's gospel passage: "**Lord, increase our faith**" may well ring a bell for us. We understand it quite well and readily make it our own when it happens that our faith weakens.

"Lord, increase our faith" means: Lord, add faith to us, add more faith to the faith we already have. Our faith in Jesus is both a gift from God that we have to receive with gratitude and a personal commitment to Jesus on our behalf in response to that gift. Our commitment to Jesus is an attitude that can grow or diminish. Faith is not just something we received one day in the past from God, something we received once and for all. Faith is something that we have to receive from God day after day and to which we have to commit ourselves day after day. Our faith in the Lord Jesus is something we are called to cultivate. We cultivate our faith by reading the Scriptures. When we read the Scriptures, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we meet with Christ. Our faith in Christ is nourished. We also cultivate our faith in the Lord Jesus by desiring to hear the teaching of the Church and consenting to put it into practice in our lives. We cultivate our faith in the Lord Jesus by caring for our neighbours, especially those in need of our help. We know how Jesus identifies himself with the poor and the needy. What we do to them, it is to Christ that we do it. We also cultivate our faith by looking at, respecting and giving thanks for the beauty of creation and consequently the grandeur of its Creator. Furthermore, we cultivate our faith by receiving the sacraments of the Church whose purpose is to strengthen the loving and saving presence of Jesus Christ in our lives.

To the apostles' prayer to the Lord: "Increase our faith", the Lord replied: "Were your 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". This image evokes something impossible. Try to uproot a tree with a vocal order... Try to plant a tree in the sea... very quickly you will realize that it does not work. The point Jesus is making here is that with faith, a tiny seed of genuine faith in the Lord, the impossible becomes possible. It happens that we find ourselves immersed in complex situations which seem to be hopeless, I mean inextricable, insoluble, without an issue. We can be caught in a painful problem, or in depression; or we can be filled with shame or fear of death. In all these situations, the only way forward open to us is to pray to the Lord, with genuine faith, and ask Him to open up a future for us. A little act of faith in Jesus can untie the knots of our lives,

enlighten our darkness, console our bruised hearts, give us peace of mind and heart, set us free from the slavery of sin, guilt, and shame, and from the fear of death.

Sometimes, on the eve of an exam or of a medical examination, or when we meet with a serious difficulty in life, we have a sudden movement of faith towards Jesus and we implore his help. It happens that we are surprised not to be given an immediate hearing and the answer to our request. We must remember that God is not just a dispensing machine! Genuine faith in Jesus is not just something punctual, ephemeral. Genuine faith in Jesus is a process which we must cultivate throughout the whole of our life. We have to receive it and then cultivate it day after day. We have to persevere in faith. We have to learn to stay awake in faith, to wait patiently. We are not alone or isolated in life, we walk in a covenant of love with Christ who is always with us, and ever ready to help us in his own way, in his own time.

The Latin word for the verb 'to believe' is 'credere'. The etymology of credere is probably 'cor-dare', to give his heart. So, the word credere means 'to give one's heart'. To have faith in Jesus is to give our heart and our mind to Jesus, to enter into a covenant of love with Him. To have faith in Jesus is to have a heart which knows the Lord's will and seeks do it. The Lord Jesus in whom we have faith is the Son of God, the Messiah foretold and awaited by the Prophets; He is our Creator and Saviour; He is the one who delivers us from sin and from the fear of death; He is the Risen Lord present in our midst.

To have faith in the Lord Jesus is to allow our hearts and minds to be enlarged to the dimensions of the heart and mind of God. We are called to enter into relationship with all our brothers and sisters in humanity who are children of God and were created in his image and likeness. This is true at personal, religious and political levels. At a personal level, we have to respect and serve all human beings. At Church level, we are called to live in communion with one another, excluding none: ecumenism and interreligious dialogue are of the essence. At political level, our countries have to work together, and help one another. Excessive forms of nationalism are not consistent with the spirit of the gospel. To have faith in the Lord Jesus is not a small matter. We need the Lord's help. With Jesus' disciples let us pray: Lord, increase our faith! Amen.