

October 6, 2019

Bishop Bradley's Reflections on the Sunday Readings

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

All of us here for Mass this morning would identify ourselves as "People of Faith"---that we are part of the Body of Christ, members of the Roman Catholic Church, the Family of Faith. Today's Scripture Readings, which we have just heard proclaimed each deal with "Faith", and so apply to us as People of Faith" very directly.

We oftentimes think about our lives in this world by using the image of "being on a Journey---a Journey of Faith". For each of us, that "Life Journey" began on the day of our Baptism----and it will come to an end on the day when we pass from this world into the next world---Heaven. Throughout our life journey, we need to "see with the eyes of Faith"----that is, we try to "see" and "act" and "live" according to God's Ways---living our lives based on God's Laws. We can ONLY do that by Faith----and of course, with God's Grace.

Once we get to Heaven, we will not need "Faith" any longer because we will see God "Face to face". But until then----throughout this life---we need Faith to, in the words of the beautiful song from "Godspell", "see Thee more clearly, love Thee more dearly, follow Thee more nearly---day by day".

Faith flows from our personal relationship with God. Sometimes, we refer to "Faith" as a gift (which of course it is---a pure "gift"), but we might mistakenly think that it's a gift which automatically grows and increases when we "do" certain things, such as follow the Commandments, come to Mass each week, and receive the Sacraments as regularly as we can.

However, the truth is that Faith flows from a personal encounter with God. In Pope Francis' very first Encyclical called "Lumen Fidei" ("Light of Faith") one of the beautiful insights he teaches there is: *"There is an urgent need to see...that faith is a light....A light this powerful cannot come from ourselves but from a more primordial source: in a word, it must come from God. Faith is born of an encounter with the Living God....Transformed by this love, we gain fresh vision, new eyes to see....Faith, received from God as a supernatural gift, becomes a light for our way, guiding our journey through time."*

In today's Gospel passage we just heard, the very first words are from the Apostles, and they make a rather strange request of Jesus: "*(Jesus) increase our faith!*" There was no "beating around the bush" on that---it was very direct, to the point, and fairly urgent. St. Luke tells us that ALL the apostles made the request---together. I find that interesting. However, if we think about it a little bit more, it makes sense. The Apostles formed the "first community of faith"---the original Church, which Jesus was in the process of establishing. Already, at that very preliminary stage, there was a very clear sense of the importance of "community".

There's no doubt that EACH of us has a personal relationship with the Living God; however, we experience our God as a community. That is why it is so important that we come together each week---as a community---to celebrate the Eucharist, and to (what the Law calls) fulfill our Sunday obligation. It's not enough to just pray to God by myself; we need to come together, as a Family of Faith, to give thanks to God and to celebrate our Faith, in union with our Bishop and, universally, with our Holy Father.

Jesus' response to the Apostles is equally interesting: "*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.*" It's the word "If" that Jesus uses---as though ANY amount of Faith is enough to accomplish amazing things. Jesus uses the word "If" as though the Apostles don't YET have the gift of Faith---perhaps because they are still developing that Personal Relationship with the Living God---they have not yet recognized Who Jesus really is! Perhaps one conclusion we can reach is that "Faith" is not a quantitative reality---it's not about how "much" Faith we have; it's not about how "big", or how "high", or how "wide" our Faith is. It is about the DEPTH of our Faith---it's about the STRENGTH of our Faith---it's about the CONVICTION of our Faith---it's about the PASSION of our Faith---it's about the URGENCY of our Faith. And THAT flows from the STRENGTH, CONVICTION, PASSION---the INTIMACY of our Relationship with Jesus Christ---the Living God.

So, perhaps the Apostles were making the wrong request. They should not have asked to "increase our Faith"; they should have asked: "How can I "see Thee more clearly, love Thee more dearly, and follow Thee more nearly, day by day by day by day by day???"

In today's First Reading, we heard the Prophet Habakkuk crying out to God in frustration: *"How long, Oh Lord? I cry for help, but you do not listen; I cry out to you 'Violence'!, but You do not intervene!"*

Have we ever done that? Of course we have. The words we use may be different, but we each at times ask: "Where are You, my God? Why aren't You solving my problems? Why aren't You solving the problems of Violence in our World---the growing disrespect for human life in our culture---the increasing poverty that paralyzes whole segments of the world's population due to unjust practices? Why do You let all the terrible things that are going on in the world go on?

God's response through Habakkuk to the people is: *"Write down the vision clearly upon the tablets...for the Vision still has its time...it will surely come; it will not be late.* In other words, God says: I DID do something----I gave you the VISION to live by---I gave you My Law----I established My covenant with you and all succeeding generations: *"I will be Your God, and you will be My People."* God's Law---and Society's Laws---are intended to be ways to keep order among us; to help people to live together in Peace and to do away with violence, disrespect for human life, injustice and greed.

It was wrong of Habakkuk, and it is wrong of us, to blame God---to accuse Him of "not listening" or "not intervening". If there's any "not listening" or "not intervening" to right wrongs going on, it would be on our part, not God's. He has given us the Vision. He has given us the 10 Commandments and the rest of the Law. He has sent us His Son, Jesus, to be our Reconciler and our Savior, and to show us how to live as People of Faith.

In today's Second Reading, St. Paul urged his dear companion Timothy: *"stir into flame the gift of God that you have....the Spirit, not of cowardice, but one of power, love and self control."* We don't need to ask Jesus for MORE Faith; we need to ask Him to help us to "stir" that Gift that comes from our relationship with our Living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, into a flaming inferno, not just an ember that's barely being kept alive.

God has given us the Vision---the Law---the Covenant Relationship. When each of us, and if all of us, would live according to that Vision—and with that strong, vibrant, intimate personal relationship---the world would be called back to its moral senses. However, that won't take place until we all get to Heaven.

In the meantime, here on Earth---here, along our Journey of Faith---here in this beautiful Celebration of the Holy Eucharist with you, this Community of Faith----
HERE, we give thanks to God for the Gift of Life, and the Gift of Faith.

God bless you, now and always.