

October 2, 2022 – Faith That Moves Mountains (27th Sunday in Ordinary Time)
Gospel of Luke 17:5-10
Fr. John

When my brother and I were kids and weren't behaving very well, our mother would, in frustration, throw up her hands, almost in supplicant prayer, and utter: 'Give me strength!'

One can almost hear that same frustration and impatience in the voice of the prophet, Habakkuk, 'O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not listen!' or in the apostles' plea to Jesus: 'Increase our faith!'

That feeling of being overwhelmed by circumstances or lacking in strength or resources is something we can all relate to at one time or another. We might even be moved to ask: 'Where is God in all this?'

Well... perhaps we need all three of today's readings to put the matter of faith into a proper perspective.

Faith places within us goals and hopes - even demands and expectations which reach far beyond our unaided human stamina.

We can begin to understand Jesus' rather enigmatic statement: 'When you have done all you have been commanded to do - say 'we are useless servants'. Our efforts have hardly measured up to the final results of God's grace in us.

Paul, in his letter to Timothy, encourages him to rekindle the gifts which God has placed within him. God did not give him [or us] a spirit of cowardice but rather of power, love, and discipline.

I remember that one of the things that I, and most seminarians dreaded when going through our formation, was the prospect of speaking in front of a congregation and saying something not only intelligent but **faith-inspiring**. It was quite a challenge - especially if you happened to be an introvert and most of us felt we were ill-equipped for the task.

I remember as a newly ordained priest, I was asked to address a large conference speaking on vocations. I was, understandably, quite nervous. Sensing my agitation, Archbishop Halpin, who was sitting next to me, leaned over to me and said: 'Don't worry John. I don't care what you say - just look happy!' Maybe that was a contemporary version of Paul's encouragement to Timothy. I don't recall what I said but out of the blue I got a phone call yesterday from Fr. Ken Koep who remembered how impressed he was by that talk. That was a pretty good endorsement! Sometimes God moves others to instill a faith in us even when we don't have faith in ourselves.

Jesus reminded his disciples that even if their faith was as tiny as a mustard seed - it could still work wonders. This would be borne out in the feeding of the five thousand with five loaves and two fish and Peter walking on the water with Jesus.

Jesus further uses the example of a servant, who even in his exhaustion, carries out his duties without fanfare or praise - simply because that's what he's supposed to do.

Doing ordinary things extraordinarily well was a byword for Mother Theresa. When we simply do the mere minimum it is not noteworthy. It's like a waiter who gives the impression that he would rather be some place else other than serving the restaurants customers.

Shortly after his election as Pope, Francis produced his first papal exhortation entitled: 'The Joy of the Gospel'. He probably sensed that for many Christians, the term 'Gospel' implied only the suffering and sacrifice that we had to endure in order to get to heaven. What a dismal attitude to take - especially when the word 'gospel' means good news.

Jesus seems to be saying that service is its own reward. Joy is to be found when we leave our comfort zones in order to reach out to others. It's a gesture that should be standard behaviour for all who claim the name 'Christian'.

Of course it takes faith to believe that and furthermore to carry it out. ['We have only done what we ought to have done']. It's how Jesus lived out his ministry and how he modelled it for the rest of us.

When we have tried it his way - our faith will be increased - because it really works! The apostles would eventually learn that and hopefully we are learning that as well.

Mediocrity is not much of a witness to the gospel and most of us try to hedge our bets and play it safe. But Jesus is the gold standard and challenges us to strive for that standard even if our faith is only a fleck of gold or the size of a mustard seed.

Faith is a two-way street. We know that we're supposed to have faith in God. But do we also know that He has faith in us!