

## “Lord, increase our faith”

Meditation on Faith, 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time<sup>1</sup>

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Many times we come to the Lord with the reasons that we have not been more effective in our service to God. Jesus today is telling us that it is not about how much money, or talent, or power or anything else we have, it is about what God can do through us and in us when we have faith.

Today's topics are faith and service to God. The disciples asked the Lord: "Increase our faith!" This expression is better translated from the Greek as "add faith to us." They think of faith as something human. Some intense believing or positive thinking resulting in good things happening. In other words, they think of faith as if it depended completely on us. But Jesus talks about faith from the Divine

Perspective, "for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord" (Is 55:8). Faith is a gift from God. It is not something that we produce, but something that we cooperate with, because it is a free gift from God.

Many times in the Gospel Jesus called his disciples "men of little faith." For example when the boat in which they were traveling was being swamped by waves (cf. Mt 8:26); or when they were anxious about what to eat or drink. On that occasion Jesus told them, "if God clothes the grass of the field will he not much more provide for you?" Today in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus tells the disciples: "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you" (Lk 17,6).

What does it mean to have faith? Faith is not something we make. It is a gift from God, which requires the cooperation from the believer. We received faith (together with other virtues) in our baptism. Faith is a virtue given by God as a grace, which entails an obligation from the part of the faithful. Consequently, faith establishes a relationship between us and God. We receive his gift but we commit to listen to him and therefore to trust in him and to obey him. In this relationship what Jesus asks from us is an attitude of total surrender and humility to him. Jesus requires from us to give space in our lives to his omnipotence, to his plans and projects, putting aside our own projects. St Cyril of Alexandria said: "Faith partly depends on us and partly is the gift of the divine grace. The beginning of faith depends on us and our maintaining confidence and faith in God with all our power. The confirmation and strength necessary for this comes from the divine grace. For that reason, since all things are possible with God, the Lord says that all things are possible for him who believes. The power that comes to us through faith is of God<sup>2</sup>."

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<sup>2</sup> Just, A. A. (Ed.). (2005). *Luke* (p. 267). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Today we are called to ask God to increase our willingness to be used by God. We received faith, therefore we are equipped to do his will, but our challenge is to open our lives to the plans of God and to let him act in us. Our challenge is to allow the Holy Spirit to do his work in our souls, so that we can reflect the Glory and Power of God, not our own glory and power.

Jesus is expecting from us to let him act in our lives, so that his work –not our work– might be accomplished, so that his Power and Glory might be revealed, not ours. “Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory” (Ps 115:1). He gives us faith but requires from us to have an attitude of a servant, who do whatever the Master tells them. Jesus said: “When you have done all you have been commanded, say ‘We are unprofitable servants; we done what we were obliged to do’” (Lk 17:9-10). “We are nothing but humble servants, and our salvation lies in acknowledging that fact. Jesus is telling us that all our human measures have no value before God.”<sup>3</sup> St. Thérèse of Lisieux used to say: “Jesus does not demand great actions from us, but simply surrender and gratitude.”

There are different stages in the journey of faith. Some people are more advanced than others. Some are at the beginning. Some others are stuck. One thing is sure, our journey of faith will face challenges. We have passed (and will pass) through sufferings and tribulations, to the point that we might say to the Lord, as the prophet Habakkuk said: “How long Lord?” He laments for the violence, injustices and suffering of the innocents in his nation. Such drama challenged his faith and therefore his relationship with God. “How long, O Lord? I cry for help but you do not listen!” (Hab 1:2) God responded with an answer, which he did not expect, “the just one because of his faith shall live” (Hab 2:4). God always responds, but not in the terms and times set by humans.

When our faith reaches a point of stagnation. When our journey seems to be stuck. When our faith stumbles because of difficult things in life, we must follow three steps: to recall the many times that God helped us in the past; to keep on moving forward with courage; to trust and have hope in God, knowing that he is faithful to his promises. Our responsorial psalm today was from Psalm 95: “If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” In the Sacred Scripture, “to listen” to the Lord means to trust in him and to have hope; therefore we could interpret the psalm like this “If today you **trust** in him, harden not your hearts.” God will not abandon us, on the contrary, as he “looks at us, he is always moved and becomes tender-hearted, with a love from the depths of his being... The consolation we need, amid the turmoil we experience in life, is precisely the presence of God in our hearts. For this reason, if we want to experience his consolation, we must give way to the Lord in our lives” (Pope Francis, Homily Oct. 1, 2016). Pope Benedict XVI said: “There is no other possibility for possessing certitude with regard to one’s life apart from self-abandonment –in a continuous crescendo– into the hands of a love that grows constantly because it comes from God.”

Our duty is to continue doing what God has commanded, trusting that His vision still presses on to its fulfillment. “Faith tells us that God has given his Son for our sakes and gives us the victorious certainty that it is really true. It transforms our impatience and our doubts into the sure hope that God holds the world in his hands and that... in spite of all darkness he ultimately triumphs in glory. Faith, which sees the love of God revealed in the pierced heart of Jesus on the Cross, gives rise to love.”(Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 39).

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<sup>3</sup> Daughters of St. Paul. (2011). *Ordinary Grace Weeks 18–34: Daily Gospel Reflections*. (M. G. Dateno & M. L. Trouvé, Eds.) (p. 173). Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media.

The Gospel shows us how great wonders are accomplished with faith of the size of a mustard seed: with a few loaves and two fishes (cf. Mt 14:15-20); with a grain of wheat that dies in the earth (cf. Jn 12:24); with the gift of just a single glass of water (cf. Mt 10:42); with the two coins of a poor widow (cf. Lk 21:1-4), with the humility of Mary, the servant of the Lord (cf. Lk 1:46-55).

Our Blessed Mother will always be the point of reference in our journey of faith. She is the woman who listened to the voice of the Lord and trusted in God completely. The plan of God in her life was accomplished thanks to her trust and confidence. She received the faith from God and cooperated fully with him.

“Saint Justin Martyr, in his dialogue with Trypho, uses a striking expression; he tells us that Mary, receiving the message of the angel, conceived ‘faith and joy.’ In the Mother of Jesus, faith demonstrated its fruitfulness; when our own spiritual lives bear fruit we become filled with joy, which is the clearest sign of faith’s grandeur. In her own life Mary completed the pilgrimage of faith, following in the footsteps of her Son” (Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, June 29, 2013). In this month of October, let us pray the Rosary every day asking our Blessed Mother to be our teacher, consoler and guide in our journey of faith.

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#### **For meditation**

In the second reading, St Paul encourages Timothy –and us– to revive the gift of God, to revive the faith (Cf. 2 Tm 1:6-14). He also gives to Timothy a series of recommendations: Do not be ashamed of your testimony to the Lord; bear your share of hardship for the Gospel with the strength that comes from God. Take as your norm the sound doctrine you heard for me; and guard this rich trust with the help of the Holy Spirit.

#### **For further reading on faith**

- Pope Francis, *Encyclical Lumen Fidei*, On Faith, June 29, 2013.
- Pope John Paul II, *Encyclical Fides et Ratio*, On the Relationship between Faith and Reason, Sept. 14, 1998.