

Homily 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C 2nd October 2016

Today's readings are all focused on faith. Faith like lots of words in the English language is a tricky concept. I can talk about my faith, the faith I believe in, as summarised in the Creeds we say at Mass this faith referred as subjective faith. Or I can talk about the faith I hold in God this is objective faith. What I often fail to realise is that faith in all its forms is a gift from God. Once I recognise that my faith is a total gift from God and that my faith alone is enough all I can do is nurture and practice my faith. As St Paul writes to Timothy you must "fan into a flame the gift that God gave you". The question for me is how?

The Benedictine nun Joan Chittister writing about the spiritual life states that it is not something that we get by wishing. The spiritual life takes discipline and has to be learned. It's not a set of daily exercises but an attitude of mind, a way of life that is lived with such intensity that no rules are necessary. However, the foundation of a spiritual life, faith is a gift from God. She tells a story about a monk instructing a novice about faith and prayer. The novice asks the monk:

“How can I increase my faith?” To which the monk replies: There are two things you must know about faith: “Firstly, faith is a gift from God and all your efforts to attain it on your own part are to no avail”. The novice somewhat dejectedly asks “And the second?” To which the monk replies “The second is that you must act as if you did not know the first”. The great challenge for me is to live my faith on a daily basis with such intensity that it becomes real and at the same time realise that this is not my own doing but that my faith is a gift from God.

The first reading from prophet Habakkuk was written on eve of the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem. The prophet’s message being that despite the impending violence and devastation “the upright man will live by his faithfulness”. The problem I have is I’m always trying to measure the outcomes for my faith. What are the implications of the prophet Habakkuk message “the upright man will live by his faithfulness”? Does that mean that all those who don’t survive, are those without faith? Is God in some way punishing the unfaithful? When I ask these questions I am reminded of something that Fr Chris de Souza said: “God created us in his image and likeness and we return the

complement.” In other words I often want God to behave as I think God should. For me such thoughts are shattered when I see my wife, my kids and grandkids or I look up into the grandeur of the night sky and remember my place in the universe. I realise that all these things are a gift to me from the wondrous God who created them all. My response, knowing full well my own human frailty and sinfulness, can only be to in faith to trust in the mercy of God. In this Year of Mercy Pope Francis reminds us that “It is not easy to entrust oneself to God's mercy, because it is an abyss beyond our comprehension. But we must!” It is only by faith that I have the courage to trust in God.

If faith in the mercy of God is important the question still remains how do I “fan it into a flame”. St Paul tells us that our faith is to be a power of witness in our lives. My faith in God calls me to lead from the front. Not only am I required to pray for the world but I also must be active in the world. My life must be energised by my attendance at Sunday Eucharist my actions must speak of my faith. If I’m worried about the effects of clerical abuse on my Church I must do everything I can to make sure that the Church’s response sets the benchmark for such a response. I must pray that our

Church leaders will have the courage to make such a response possible. My faith must dictate both my prayers and actions. When some of my friends found out that I was to be ordained a Deacon, I was often asked: How can you become part of such a Church that inflicted so much pain on people. My response was I'm already part of that Church. I already feel the pain of the victims and its okay to be angry with the Church for the abuse suffered. In fact I would point out to them that as a father and grandfather I'm angry about the situation and if they were not angry I would be worried about them. But I point out that my faith compels me to step up to publicly proclaim by my actions what our faith is all about. I once said; "I don't just want to read the Gospel I want to proclaim it by my actions in the wards of our hospitals". We can't undo the wrongs of the past but we can respond to them in such a way as we will become known not for what happen but by how we responded to it. Such a response is only possible when my life is energised by my faith. We must become faithful "servants of faith".

Deacon George Bryan