

Friday (Edith Stein)

Only children of grace can in fact be bearers of Christ's cross. To suffer and to be happy although suffering, to have one's feet on the earth, to walk on the dirty and rough paths of this earth and yet to be enthroned with Christ at the Father's right hand, to laugh and cry with the children of this world and ceaselessly sing the praises of God with the choirs of angels – this is the life of the Christian until the morning of eternity breaks forth.

Scripture (Luke 17:5-10)

The apostles said 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. Which of you, with a servant ploughing or minding sheep, would say to him when he returned from the fields, 'Come and have your supper immediately'? Would he not be more likely to say, 'Get my supper laid; make yourself tidy and wait on me while I eat and drink. You can eat and drink yourself, afterwards'? Must he be grateful to the servant for doing what he was told? So with you: when you have done all you have been told to do, say, 'We are merely servants: we have done no more than our duty.'"

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27th Week of Ordinary Time

Ask what you can do for God, not why he wants you to do it

It came as a bit of a shock to realise that the apostles' request, 'Increase our faith', (Luke 17:5-10), is one I rarely ask of God. I ask to be more forgiving, to be more loving, more humble, but not for more faith. Their request, then, is a challenge for me to think what would happen if I did ask for an increase in faith. Jesus' answer points to it being about being able to do more, (so it isn't about being more certain in what I know.) I've always felt reluctant to attempt to do what is beyond my power, assuming that if I can't heal people or move mulberry bushes, it must mean I haven't got much faith. Jesus saying I could not only uproot a mulberry tree (which has very deep roots) but then also plant it in the sea to grow makes me think my faith must be miniscule.

He is using hyperbole to say that the apostles could, with a small amount of faith, achieve far more than they think they could. Their request comes at a time when they must be feeling that what lies ahead is too much for them, coming after all Jesus' warnings about opposition to him, persecutions for them and finally disruption and difficulties from within their own community that will require them to constantly forgive people. No wonder they feel daunted and full of doubt.

Doubt, though, is a sign of an active and growing faith. The prophet Habakkuk, for instance, is living in terrible times with the Israelites suffering vicious persecution at the hands of the godless Chaldeans. Habakkuk cannot understand where God is or why he is letting this happen. He doesn't settle for 'God works in mysterious ways' - he engages in what can best be described as a stand-up row with God, demanding to know why he doesn't intervene and, how a God of love and justice can apparently use violence and injustice to achieve his ends. God promises that justice will be done and his power will win through – but not for a while. People will need to keep faith in God, keep living in his ways even though all seems to be going wrong, believing that God hasn't abandoned them, nor that he doesn't really have the power to make his plans come to fruition but that he is always at work, on his timetable.

This is the faith the apostles would need. Apart from the dangers they will face, they must be wondering how on earth God would let his Messiah - and his followers - face all this rejection and persecution without coming to their help? Surely Jesus was describing failure, not the fulfilment of God's plans? Faith will allow them to act as Jesus does in Gethsemane when he too was at a loss to understand God's ways but still trusted enough to follow them. His prayer began by telling God what he wanted, (three times), but he listened and followed what God wanted. From the trials in the desert to Gethsemane, Jesus asked God what he should do. I am sure that, as he was fully human he often struggled with God, but always came to the point of 'my will, not your will'.

This is the faith in God shown by Abraham when told to leave his country without being told where he was going; by Mary when she said, in her confusion, 'be it done unto me according to your will'; by Mother Teresa when she left the security of her convent with a few pence to her name.

All acted as servants, seeking to do God's will without looking for reward. Seeking to know God's will is different from knowing his plans – it requires an openness in prayer and in responding to the Holy Spirit which I for one will need to ask for more faith to be able to do.

Martin Bennett

Monday (Martin Luther King)

I was ready to give up. I tried to move out of the picture without appearing to be a coward. I prayed to God saying, "I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I can't face it alone." At that point I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never before experienced him. The outer situation remained the same, but God had given me inner calm.

Scripture (Habakkuk 1:2-3, 2:2-4)

How long, Lord, am I to cry for help while you will not listen; to cry, 'Violence!' in your ear while you will not save? Why do you make me see wrong-doing, why do you countenance oppression? Outrage and violence, this is all I see, contention and discord flourish. Then the Lord answered me and said, 'Write the vision down, inscribe it on tablets to be easily read. For the vision is for its appointed time, it hastens towards its end and it will not lie; if it comes slowly, wait for it, for come it certainly will without fail. You see, anyone whose heart is not upright will succumb, but the upright will live through faithfulness.

Tuesday (Cardinal Basil Hume)

God may sometimes wish us to dwell, for a time, in darkness so as to be better able to receive, later on, a greater and stronger light. If we know that God is with us, there is much that we can endure, for pain and sorrow will pass and joy and peace will return. We can only pray: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" How he, who was God, could know such abandonment, such emptiness, we do not know. If we are called to share that same experience, and when thoughts and words increase the pain and confusion of our minds, then are we surely one with him. His darkest moment, and ours, are one darkness. Into that darkness comes his light, not ours, but his is given to us to be our peace.

Scripture (Psalm 22:1-2,19-20,22-26)

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? The words of my groaning do nothing to save me. My God, I call by day but you do not answer, at night, but I find no respite. Lord, do not hold aloof! My strength, come quickly to my help; rescue my soul from the sword.

I shall proclaim your name, praise your name in full assembly. For he has not despised nor disregarded the poor, he has not turned away his face but has listened to the cry for help. The poor will eat and be filled, those who seek the Lord will praise him, 'May your heart live forever.'

Wednesday (Pope Paul VI)

We ourselves must be convinced of the need for a living, true and active faith. Even more today when the difficulties are so much greater. It is not enough to have a vague, weak and uncertain faith which is purely one of sentiment and habit, made up of theories, doubts and reservations. Nor is it enough to hold a faith which just accepts what it pleases, or which seeks to avoid difficulties by denying assent to truths which themselves are both difficult and mysterious.

Scripture (Hebrews 10:32-35)

Remember the great challenge of the sufferings that you had to meet after you received the light, in the earlier days; sometimes by being yourself publicly exposed to the humiliations and violence, and sometimes as associates of those who were in prison, but you accepted with joy being stripped of your belongings, knowing that you owned something that was better and lasting. Do not lose your fearlessness now, then, since the reward is so great. You will need perseverance if you are to do God's will and gain what he has promised.

Thursday (Fr. Bede Griffiths)

People ask, "How can I know the will of God?" You can only know it by experience, by trying, by making mistakes. In time you find you are getting guidance. This is one of the most important effects of meditation, when you begin to get that sense of guidance in your life, and you begin to see that you are not managing life just by yourself. God himself is acting in you.

Scripture(2 Cor. 1:3-6)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the merciful Father and the God who gives every encouragement; he supports us in every hardship, so that we are able to come to the support of others, in every hardship of theirs because of the encouragement that we ourselves receive from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow into our lives, so to does the encouragement we receive from Christ. So if we have hardships to undergo, this will contribute to the encouragement and your salvation. The encouragement you receive enables you to bear with perseverance the same sufferings as we do.