

LIFE GETS HARDER

Lk. 17:5-10

A teenage girl once came to her father with her problems. She was finding homework hard, her friends were not being nice to her and she was finding it hard to cope with peer pressure. Her father listened to her patiently and tried to console her, telling her to be strong and she would find things would change for the better. Her reply was, "It's alright for you, Dad. You have all this behind you, you are not facing the problems I have to face." That girl is now a mother of three teenage children and has come to see that her school problems were nothing compared with the ones she has to face now.

There is a tendency for us to think that life becomes easier the older we get. Our burdens will be lighter. This expectation is largely a pleasant dream. Every moment of life has its own problems and we have to face them.

A small child has to learn to walk and talk, to dress and feed himself. Soon he masters these skills but he soon finds there are new ones to face even more demanding. He goes to school and he has to learn to read and write and do sums. The day comes when he has to get a job and earn money to feed and clothe not only himself, but also his wife and children. If he lives long enough and becomes helpless, he may have to allow someone else to feed and dress him. Life doesn't get easier, it gets harder.

Jesus had something of this in mind when he told us the story in today's Gospel. There was once a servant who worked in the fields all day long. At sunset you would have thought he could have fed himself and deserved a good evening's rest. No, he first had to prepare and serve his master's evening meal. Only after that was he allowed to eat. Before he retired he would be expected to tidy the kitchen and make everything ready for the morning. When he did get to bed he was probably too tired to sleep.

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This story is not like Jesus' usual ones of showing mercy, kindness and gratitude. The master took advantage of his servant. He gave no thought as to how his servant was feeling. He didn't seem at all grateful. This is the very attitude that Jesus condemned. Then Jesus concludes with not very encouraging words, "When you have done all you have been told to do, say, 'We are merely servants: we have done no more than our duty.'"

What are we to make of all this? Jesus story is true to life. Many of us can relate to the servant's experience. Our days are long. After an 8 hour stint at work there is more to be done when we get home. If we are mothers we have to cook and wash for the family and often the work is done with little or no expression of appreciation from anyone. She is expected to do it. She understands the man who said, "I feel overworked, underpaid and unappreciated."

Life is essentially hard and we mustn't expect it to get easier. As I said each stage of life has its hardships. Perhaps the hardest of all is for the old person who has to face failing health and the increasing loss of independence. We wish it were otherwise and wonder why it is not. It's just not going to change. Would we really like a world where we could draw a line under all our problems and live a comfortable life? I think many of us would get bored. Life would be dull. We are made to face challenges and solve problems.

Have you ever watched children play in a park? You can see a father at the foot of a slide urging his little one to let go of the side and slide down. "I'm here to catch you," says the father. "I'll see that you don't hurt yourself." Eventually the child slides down and realises how easy it is. After a few slides he gets bored with it and looks for something more daring to challenge and entertain him. That is typical of human nature. We look for new challenges, just for the joy of overcoming them. Isn't this why people climb mountains and run marathons?

Let us not forget that Jesus told this story of the hard working

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servant at the request of His Apostles, "Increase our faith." Where is the connection? Is He telling them and us that an increase of faith does not make life easier? An increase of faith means that we are given the strength to make us stronger, that we may be equal to the ever-increasing demands that life has in store for us.

Lord Jesus, give us the strength we need to face all the challenges that life throws at us, and when we have done our best, let us consider ourselves servants who have done no more than our duty.