

HOMILY for 27th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year C

Every morning an elderly woman would step out on her porch, raise her arms to heaven, and shout, “Praise God”

An atheist happened to buy the house next door to her, and over the months he became very irritated with the spiritual woman. After six months of hearing her shout “Praise God” each morning, he went outside on his porch one day and yelled, “There is no God!”

The godly woman wasn’t put off in the least. She continued to praise God every day. One cold winter morning, the atheist heard the woman shout a different message.

“Help me, Lord,” the woman prayed. “It’s very cold and I am out of food and money.”

When the woman went outside the next morning, there was enough food on the porch to last her a month.

“Praise God!” she shouted.

The atheist stepped out from the bushes and said, “There is no God! I bought all of those groceries for you!”

The woman raised her arms to the sky and said, “Praise God! You sent me groceries and made the devil pay for them!”

That woman truly has deep faith in God amidst her life challenges. Anyway, the Apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.” Why did the Apostles ask the Lord to do that for them? Shouldn’t they ask the Lord for worldly things or, something else? There must be some reasons why the Apostles asked the Lord for more faith & nothing else. Here is one of the reasons why we need more faith. Jesus said, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this sycamore, ‘Be uprooted & transplanted into the sea,’ & it would obey you.” Jesus seemed to tell us that if we have just tiny little faith, about the size of a mustard seed, & wish something to happen like having a sycamore to move to a new location, it will be done for us. That might be easier said than done. For in reality, we can wish a lot of things to happen our way, but they do not always turn out the way we want. We might wish our life to be trouble free, but that is never true in real life.

What are other reasons for us to have faith? Another reason for us to have faith is to give us courage & strength to deal with our life problems. Today’s First Reading shares with us on how frustrated & overwhelmed we must have felt in dealing with our life problems. It expresses our feeling as the following, “How long, O Lord? I cry for help, but you do not listen! I cry to you, ‘Violence!’, but you do not intervene. Why do you let me see ruin; why must I look at misery?” As you can see, problems seem to come at us from left and right. We try to call for help, but no one seems to give us any assistance. We wonder how long we’ll have to endure our miseries & life problems. We cannot handle our life burden on our own. This is when we need to have faith & call upon the divine power to give us courage & strength to face our life problems. Besides courage & strength, faith also calls us to be patient & reflective about all the things that happened in our life. That way, we might be able to see God’s plan for us in the future. Today’s First Reading explains it in this way, “...Write down the vision clearly upon the tablets, so that one can read it readily. For the vision still has its time, presses on to fulfillment, & will not disappoint... The rash person has no integrity; but the just person, because of his faith, shall live.” So, apparently faith can give us vision of the future & teach us to wait patiently

for it to unfold amidst our troublesome life. Faith calls us to be patient & let God reveal God's plan for us out of our current miseries & problems.

That leads me to the top reason as to why we must have faith, namely, giving us hope. A person of faith is always hopeful & optimistic about the future. This person might endure a lot of sufferings & problems in his/her life. But, his/her steadfast faith in God helps him/her to have a positive & hopeful outlook in spite of all the crosses & difficulties in his/her life. Nothing can dampen the hopeful spirit of a faithful person. We have a lot of good examples about these people in our Christian tradition; & we call them saints. Saints are faithful people with a hopeful vision about the future.

I would not tell you the truth about faith if I don't admit that it is a bit scary to put our life & future plans in God's hands. For we all want to have full control of our life & plan our future details on our own. We don't like our future to be uncertain & unprepared. Let me share with you my personal experiences about faith. As you might know, I'm a survivor of the Viet Nam War & its aftermath. The war itself its consequences had turned the life of many innocent people upside down. Thousands of people had lost their lives in that war. For the war survivors like me, life under the Communist regime was like Hell on earth. We had to endure lots of sufferings every day & face an uncertain future. We had to rely on faith to make it through each day; hence I know how it feels to rely on faith to guide my daily life. Then, I had to sneak out of Viet Nam in spite of all kinds of dangers & depend on faith to guide me through an uncertain future in a foreign land.

While faith has given me hope & encouragement throughout my life, I've always felt worried & stressful facing my daily challenges. But, I'm grateful to my faith & feel compelled to witness it to the world. During my years of priesthood, I have counted on faith to help me pull through some challenging times such as tight parish budget, hiring new parish staff, or keeping everyone at church safe in the last 3 years of Covid. I have also encouraged the Search Committee to rely on faith & let God help us find the right Parish Staff to fill 5 positions here. I have guided the Parish through Covid & tough-budget years & called on everyone to let faith show us the way. Our Parish Staff & I have used prayers & support from above to calm our worries & concerns. In today's Second Reading, St. Paul calls us to witness our faith in Jesus as following, "...Never be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord; but with the strength which comes from God, bear your share of the hardship which the Gospel entails... Guard the rich deposit of faith with the help of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us." So, St. Paul evidently asks us to show the world the power & benefits of faith even though we might feel worried & scared about our future.

My dear brothers & sisters, a friend of mine sought comfort & guidance from me in the hospital right after the loss of his wife & said, "Father, I don't know what I would do without my Christian faith." His courageous witness of the Christian faith in the toughest moment of his life really touched me & has helped me appreciate my Christian faith much more amidst my daily challenges. Like my friend, I don't know what I would do without my Christian faith. So, today I join with the apostles & ask the Lord, "Increase my faith." How about you?