

Homily for the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

October 2, 2022

St. Bavo Parish

Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.

First Reading: Habakkuk 1:2-3; 2:2-4 (Wait for the vision to be fulfilled.)

Responsory: Psalm 95 (If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.)

Second Reading: 2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14 (Stir into flame your gift of God.)

Gospel: Luke 17:5-10 (Profitable servants do more than they are commanded to do.)

Today's first reading comes from the Prophet Habakkuk. I'm guessing that many of you have never heard of Habakkuk. Most people haven't. He's one of the so-called "minor prophets" in the Old Testament. His writings consist of a mere three chapters, just a few pages in our Bibles. Yet, within that small body of work from this ancient prophet we can find a Word of the Lord that is both relevant and instructive for our lives in this modern world.

Habakkuk is deeply troubled by what is happening among his people and throughout the Middle East around 600 B.C. He sees rampant corruption among his political leaders, violence and injustice throughout his society, and an imminent threat of warfare in the region. He has seen a new, powerful empire arise in the north. The Babylonians have captured the Assyrian capital, Nineveh, and it seems only a matter of time before they will also threaten the Jewish capital, Jerusalem. If the people continue to ignore the Lord's commandments, and if the Lord refuses to protect them from the invaders, the city will surely fall. Habakkuk is justifiably worried, and he wants to know how long God is going to sit by and let this violence and misery continue, before he steps in and does something about it.

The Lord answers Habakkuk, but not in the way that he had hoped. God does not promise to quell the violence, right the injustices, put an end to the strife, and remove the danger from foreign enemies. Instead, he assures the prophet that he has a grand vision for the future of his people. He says, "The vision still has its time, presses on to fulfillment, and *will not disappoint.*" However, he also warns that the vision will not come to fruition immediately. Those who demand swift action will be disappointed and frustrated, while those who possess *faith* will see their hopes realized, in God's time and in God's way.

We who are concerned about the fragile state of our world, our nation and our Church *today* should listen attentively to this prophetic message. It can serve as both a warning against complacency and hopelessness and an exhortation to greater patience and faith. It does not discourage us from looking for solutions to our problems, but it reminds us that God does not work according to our timelines and our plans. We may want a quick resolution to all that we see wrong with the world. We may cry out to God, "How long, O Lord?" But, the Lord's response to Habakkuk is also his response to us: "*Wait* for the vision to be realized. It will surely come, it will not be late."

As we grow increasingly frustrated by God's apparent *inaction*, we can fall into one of two traps. On the one hand, we might think that we have all the answers. If only God would listen to us and follow our advice, then all would be well. But, God's vision and God's wisdom far exceed ours. We need to listen *to God*, not demand that God listen *to us*. At the other

extreme, we might give up hope and think that all is lost. We can tell ourselves that *there are no answers* to life's problems. But, God's power is infinitely greater than ours. He can find solutions even where we see none. Hence, we must trust in God and do everything that we can to cooperate with his will.

This last point is very important. We must *cooperate* with God's will, even if the details of God's vision are quite murky. As servants of the Lord, we cannot just sit by idly and wait for the Lord to do everything for us. He has empowered us to *act*, if only we are willing to call upon the immense spiritual strength that has been given to us. St. Paul's instruction to his old traveling companion, Timothy, can be very helpful in this regard. Although he is mainly trying to motivate Timothy to be a good Bishop, Paul's words are just as applicable to all of us who bear the name of Christian today. He exhorts Timothy to "stir into flame the gift of God" that he received at his ordination. He could just as easily be telling us to "stir into flame the gift of God" that we received at our *baptism*, when we were anointed with the Holy Spirit and charged to participate in Christ's threefold ministry as priest, prophet and king. Paul also tells Timothy, "... bear your share of hardship for the gospel *with the strength that comes from God.*" This, too, applies equally well to all of us, whom the Lord has commanded to "take up our cross" and follow him. Just like Timothy, we are called to testify to Christ with our lives, and we are given all the strength that we need to fulfill that mission.

Faith certainly is essential to this task, but not faith that God can act *alone* to accomplish his will. What is needed is faith that God can act *through us* to accomplish his will in the world. Today's gospel begins with Jesus' disciples asking him to increase their faith. But, rather than granting that request, Jesus tells them that the faith they *already have* is sufficient to work miracles, even to uproot a mulberry tree and plant it in the sea. Nevertheless, the parable that follows suggests that the disciples may lack something else. Jesus asks them to consider how a master would regard his servants who simply do their assigned tasks and nothing more. He will not shower them with praise for doing only what they were commanded to do. If they want to be "*profitable servants,*" they must anticipate the master's desires and go *beyond* the call of duty to carry out his will. This is where those first disciples, and us modern-day disciples, often fall short. Too often, we are content to do the bare minimum, to avoid serious sin and fulfill our most basic obligations, but not actively *serve* the Lord with all our strength and all of our gifts.

If we lack faith at all, it may be the faith that God can make us into profitable servants. We may be painfully aware of our weaknesses and shortcomings, but *not fully aware* of our strengths and our vast potential. So, perhaps what we really *should* pray for is an increase in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which we already possess, and a greater understanding of how we can use those gifts to serve the Lord and his people. Then we will be empowered to live our Christian lives with zeal and great joy, going well beyond what is *commanded* of us.