

HOMILY SUN 27-C

“Faith Makes All The Difference”

(Habakkuk 1:2-3; 2:2-4; Psalm 95; 2 Tim 1:6-8; 13-14; Luke 17:5-10)

A fellow was hiking in the mountains when he fell over a cliff. Halfway down the face of the mountain, he luckily managed to grab hold of a branch with both hands that stopped his fall. Suspended between heaven and earth, he looked up and saw he had fallen a long ways. He looked down and saw he could have fallen a much longer distance – the people below looked like ants. In desperation he called out for help. A loud voice responded, “Yes, what do you want?” The man asked who that was and the voice replied, God. “If you are God, can you get me out of here?” asked the man. The voice replied, “Yes I can – have faith, let go of the branch, and I will take you to safety.” The man looked up and saw how far he had fallen; looked down and saw how far it was to the road below, tried to let go of the branch, and finally cried out, “Is there anybody else up there?”

Be a righteous person: Let your faith make all the difference.

The readings today are all about the difference that faith can make in our lives, regardless of what is going on all around us. In summary, faith gives us a vision to live with; a Word to live by; hope of renewal, and a reason to be grateful. Indeed, faith can make all the difference.

First, faith gives us a vision to guide us. The first reading resonates with watching the news today; so much violence and destruction from war and natural disasters. It also resonates with all the problems and difficulties that confront us in our relationships, families, communities and country. As in the day of the prophet Habakkuk, God assures us that there is still a vision for the appointed time. God has a vision for the world and that vision will be accomplished. And that assurance can help each of us to have a vision for the world, our own faith vision that will empower us to continue.

My own vision is wrapped up in my coat of arms and my motto as a bishop - *Regnum Dei Intra Vos* – the kingdom of God is among us. I truly believe that, though at times it is hard to recognize it when I see low church attendance, more and more Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, lack of marital commitment, financial shortages, buildings needing maintaining, youth not involved, family break-ups, suicides, gang violence, abuse of all kinds and so much addictive behaviour, etc. In spite of all this and more, God’s word resonates loud and clear – there is a vision for the appointed time, and the righteous will live by this faith vision. It is that faith that helps us see the glimmers of hope and signs of the kingdom of God breaking through, such as a young family man who feels called to do full time ministry regardless of the sacrifice that might be involved.

Second, faith calls us to listen to God’s word and express our faith in joyful praise. The Psalm reminds us of this great source of hope – God’s Word is an anchor for us in times of difficulty, stress, change and transition. God’s word is there to teach us, sustain us, guide us and heal us. As we turn more and more to the study and appreciation of the

Word of God, we will find ourselves empowered to express our faith in joyful worship and praise. That is a great antidote to the pessimism of the world today.

Third, the reading from 2 Timothy gives us hope for renewal. We are strongly invited to *rekindle in us the gift of God that is within us!* Through sound teaching that deepens our faith, we will even be able to accept some suffering for the sake of Christ. We will be able to go beyond the constant search for cheap grace, sensational manifestations and quick fixes. We will be renewed in our commitment to follow the Lord in quietly loving God, loving and caring for each other and accepting ourselves as we are – regardless of what that will cost us in terms of time, talent and treasure. We will be constantly growing in faith, hope and love, rekindling the gift of God that is within us.

We will have the courage to work on our issues, to heal our addictions and to let go of any abusive behaviour. One spiritual writer, Anne Bingham, put it well in the booklet *Living With Faith* - “Faith isn’t an analgesic that takes pain away, but the belief that God is with us in pain as well as in joy.” We will strive to be faithful to the teachings of the Church with regard to pro-life values, marriage, sexuality, and procreation.

Lastly, the gospel reminds us that genuine faith leads to gratitude, not greed. We are reminded that all is grace – to expect repayment for doing good or to have the view that God owes us something for doing good, is to miss the mark completely. When we have done all that God is asking of us, especially to love God back, by loving our neighbours and even our enemies, is not to earn spiritual credits, but to simply be more like God, and that is a gift, not a reward.

As the New Interpreter’s Bible, puts it, the parable of the unworthy servant drives us to re-examine our assumptions about our relationship to God, who owes us nothing for living good, Christian lives. God’s favour and blessings are matters of grace, they cannot be earned. Therefore, when we assume that we can deal with God on the basis of what God owes us, we have made a basic mistake. We have rejected grace as the basis of our relationship to God and based that relationship on our own worth and merit. By definition, grace is a free gift. The point is that the disciple can do what God requires, through faith, but the disciple can never do more than what is required. We cannot meet even the basic demand on our own – only through faith can we protect the little ones and rebuke and forgive as we ought.

An example of a person with living faith is David. David is one who cannot lie; who quietly goes about living the truth. When his daughter rolled his truck before she had a license, he refused to lie to the insurance company and admitted that it was his daughter who was driving. Another time, when boarding the ferry to Victoria, the ticket agent told Louis that he shouldn’t have told him the age of his kids - now he had to charge him. “No one would have known the difference,” he told David. David’s reply was simply, “The kids would have.” At a stag for a nephew, a stripper was brought in. David told his brother, “Let’s go, we’re out of here.” That took raw courage. He is now struggling bravely with a serious disease and so far has kept it in recession by good medical attention, but also especially by faith and prayer.

The Eucharist that we celebrate together today is a faith experience of God's covenant love that makes us a family, sharing in the son-ship of Jesus. We gather around the family table to celebrate our belonging and renew our covenant of faith and love.

So, be a righteous person: live by faith and let it make all the difference in your life.

RITUAL: Invite people to process up and plant a mustard seed in a pot.