

Homily For Friday of the 17th Week of Ordinary Time - Year 1

St Peter's 8:30 AM Mass - July 30, 2021

Leviticus 23:Some of 1-37 "You shall call these the most solemn and holy festivals of the Lord."

Psalm 81:2-10 "Sing with joy to God our help."

Matthew 13:54-58 "Is this not the carpenter's son? Where did this man get all this?"

Without Faith, No Deeds of Power

Introduction

Many years ago, a co worker put some doubt in my head about Jesus. I had never heard his argument that the power to be healed is in us and that Jesus' main purpose was to help humanity unlock the potential within themselves. In this theory, Jesus is like a modern motivational guru. He was the Tony Robbins of his time. Robbins book is titled just that: The Power Within.

I did not know what to say to this. It did not fit with my understanding of Jesus the miracle worker. Unlike today's saint, Peter Chrysologus, who it says eradicate paganism and inspired faith by his homilies and his articulation of the Catholic faith in the 5th century.

That conversation was still with me when I came across Mark's account of the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' robe while he was walking along surrounded by crowds. Remember that? Mark tells us, "Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned and said: Who touched me?" Then, to the woman, he said, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Be healed."

That passage made it clear that our faith opens the door to God working in us. However, the way they put it in philosophy, faith is necessary but it is not sufficient. The power to heal, like the life force itself, is absolutely from God.

How I wished I could renew that conversation with my co worker, but for some reason the time was never right. That is why you and I need to know our faith well enough to be able to express it to an unbelieving world around us. We have to be ready, as Peter says in his first letter, "to give a reason for the hope that is in you."

Jesus

Jesus had amazed people with his powerful teaching before. Many times people had been astounded or astonished by his power over sickness and infirmity. But, in his home town of Nazareth, the people take offense at him. Their amazement is not about how much they admire him. Rather, it is an expression of suspicion and anger. They know Jesus and his family and cannot believe that he is now a great prophet. How can **he** be filled with such wisdom and mighty deeds?

Matthew tells us that Jesus did some miracles in Nazareth, but not many, because of their lack of faith. He could do it. That's the power of God. But he refuses to be like a circus act, performing miracles to convince his opponents. The word Matthew uses for this lack of faith means 'unbelief'. This word is used in the Gospel only to describe those who oppose and reject Jesus. In other circumstances, as when the apostles submit to fear or struggle to understand, they are called "men of little faith". But, the people in Jesus' home town are outright unbelievers who take offense at him and reject him.

Have you ever come across an attitude about Jesus, even amongst professing Christians, that he is like a cartoon character, the friendly miracle worker, who is just an all around good guy who just wants people to feel good. This is a very dangerous idea and has been the cause of much loss of faith. It is true that God has made us to experience the joy of knowing him, and Jesus is the incarnate Son, the fullness of the one who made us for joy. However, he is also likely to challenge us about our tendency to worship the many temptingly juicy, but false, gods of the world. He is still calling us to turn away from the world and repent so that we might receive the fullness of freedom from our own sinfulness.

Exodus

The faith that opens us up to the power of God working in our lives is supported at every step of the journey by proper worship. This is the message of today's excerpts from the book of Leviticus. We have just let Exodus and are now continuing Israel's foundation stories. Today we have the prescription to celebrate three important festivals. The first is Passover, the remembrance of

God's people being taken out of slavery. The second is Pentecost, 50 days later, celebrating the giving of Torah, God's revelation of himself in the law. The third is the Feast of Tabernacles: in the fall, celebrating the dedication of the temple.

All three have two essential elements. First is that God has always been present to his people: when they were suffering in slavery, when they were freed from that slavery, when they wandered in wilderness in utter dependence on God to sustain them and, finally, in the land of promise. The anchor is God's presence. God dwells with his people. Above all, it's a spiritual journey, a pilgrimage.

The world of affluence has lost its faith because the people have stopped seeing themselves on a pilgrimage. I submit to you that the world looks like the end of a journey. We have all the fun and satisfaction we could want at our fingertips.

If we are to keep our faith, we must see ourselves as still on the pilgrimage to our true home, with God's own Son walking with us every step. What does Leviticus tell us to do on that pilgrimage? Give our first fruits to God: the first moments of our day, our top priority throughout the day and, especially our observance of the Lord's Day. It should look like we worship Jesus Christ. Worship consistently and properly, not making up our own idols.

The people received exact instructions for worship. We have the same. But it's not empty actions. Our liturgy only makes sense when God has our hearts. Have no strange gods, the psalmist says. Worship is key. Worship builds faith. No deeds of power can be done in our lives without it.

Call To Action

Today Jesus is still seen as an ordinary man with nice affirming words, telling us that we have the power to heal ourselves. People are still taking offense at the real Jesus who calls us to conversion of heart and mind and action. Jesus still can't do many deeds of power among such a people. That's why you and I must cultivate faith. The world is in need of us. Let our worship be precise. Let our practise of faith shine forth. Let our faith be in the real Jesus Christ.