

Homily for the 27th Week of Ordinary Time
October 6th 2019

Bringing Heaven to our Souls

Today's Mass invites us to think about what it means to live by faith. Faith enables us to believe all that God has revealed in the Bible about our relationship to him. Yet there is a tension we face. While we want to live by faith, our souls can be gripped and governed by fear.

When we live in fear, faith can be smothered and even extinguished. We come to believe that God is not with us because we are overcome with a sense of our own failure, weakness, inadequacy and sinfulness. We can look at the world in which we live and become discouraged and despairing because of the magnitude of suffering and apparent hopelessness. If fear comes to direct our lives, we will live governed by the lie that God is absent or even non-existent.

So, here is the question we daily face. Will we be governed by fear or by faith?

This tension between faith and fear is helpfully illustrated by the African impala. The impala can jump to a height of over 10 feet and cover a distance of greater than 30 feet. Yet these magnificent creatures can be kept in an enclosure in any zoo with a 3-foot wall. The animals will not jump if they cannot see where their feet will fall. Faith is the ability to trust what we cannot see, and with faith we are freed from the flimsy enclosures of life that only fear allows to entrap us.¹

Fear is like that wall. The more it grips our soul, the higher it can become and the more trapped we feel.

The cry of the Apostles' in today's Gospel reading is our cry too:
With the Apostles in today's Gospel we pray:

***“Lord increase our faith”
and conversely
“Decrease our fear O Lord!”***

Why is this so important?

Little faith will bring your soul to heaven, but great faith will bring heaven to your soul. Those with increasing faith discover more fully the freedom God wants us to know so that we can run free like an impala on the African Savanna.

Our readings for today invite us to think of three dimensions where we can pray:

Lord increase our faith

The reading Habakkuk points out the exterior dimension of faith. The reading from the Gospel speaks of the posterior dimension of faith. The reading from the Epistle speaks of the interior dimension of faith.

The exterior, posterior and interior dimensions of faith. We need to be aware of all three because although little faith will bring our soul to heaven, great faith will bring heaven to our soul. And we want to have great faith!

1. **The Exterior Dimension:**

We are still living in the world. Because of this there are times that our faith will be severely tested because of what is going on in our exterior world. We might experience great suffering and we may even be confronting incarnate evil in our lives at the present. With the prophet Habakkuk we can cry out:

***Destruction and violence are before me;
strife and contention arise.²***

Here is the challenge faith can experience in its exterior dimension. Because of suffering we may wonder:

“Where is God”?

How long must I endure such pain? Why is life filled with so much bad news?

But as we ask these heart wrenching questions, the person of faith is also open to the Lord, so we can hear this answer:

***³For there is still a vision for the appointed time;
it speaks of the end, and does not lie.
If it seems to tarry, wait for it;
it will surely come, it will not delay.***

Here the Lord, in responding to the anguish of Habakkuk, gives to him the vision of faith that looks to the end. And while it can seem so slow in coming, the person of faith, in relation to his or her exterior challenges, intentionally cultivates the virtue of enduring patience and will recommit themselves to the truth of the word of God.

There are many people who when experiencing trials in their exterior life put God on trial and so become embittered. Not so the person who is praying, “Jesus increase my faith”.

This is because they also have the posterior dimension. Posterior, in the sense I mean it here, is defined as “those who come before”. This is a dimension we all have. There have been people living by faith for thousands years before we ever came into the world. People who through their earthly lives understood that to have the faith the size of a mustard seed can increase, and heaven can come to our souls. These are the ones who in going before us are able to honestly say that Jesus can work even through me, though in comparison to his majesty and glory I am like a worthless slave.

At the Mass On Tuesday last we marked the Feast Day of St. Therese of Lisieux, who died at the age of 24 on October 1st 1897. She lived a life of seclusion and anonymity in a French Carmelite convent. She had a wonderful insight into faith's posterior dimension when she wrote in her "Story of a Soul"

Jesus set the book of nature before me and I saw that all the flowers he has created are lovely. The splendor of the rose and the whiteness of the lily do not rob the little violet of its scent nor the daisy of its simple charm. I realized that if every tiny flower wanted to be a rose, spring would lose its loveliness and there would be no wildflowers to make the meadows gay. It is just the same in the world of souls - which is the garden of Jesus. He has created the great saints who are like the lilies and the roses, but he has also created much lesser saints and they must be content to be the daisies or the violets which rejoice his eyes whenever he glances down. Perfection consists in doing his will, in being that which he wants us to be. Jesus, help me to simplify my life by learning what you want me to be - and becoming that person.³

Such is the posterior dimension of faith. People with this dimension can celebrate we all have a place within Jesus' Garden of souls.

So, faith has the exterior and posterior dimensions. It also has an internal dimension. That dimension which is at the heart of every human soul. It is this dimension Paul speaks of in today's Epistle and the one where the battle between faith and fear is the most intense.

For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; ⁷for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

We are to rekindle the gift of faith that was given to us in our baptism and confirmation when hands were laid upon us. May I respectfully suggest that many Catholics who have received the laying on of hands have allowed the gift of faith to smolder because they have not rekindled the gift. This is something we are called and invited to do daily.

The story is told of a native elder who described the interior battle in this way to his grandson:

***My son, the battle is between two wolves. One is Evil it is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, superiority and ego. The other is good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith. The grandson thought about this is then asked his grandfather
Which wolf wins?
The old man simply replied: "The one you feed".***⁶

May we discover ever more how to feed the gift of faith, the good wolf and starve the wolf of fear. In so doing we will have the wisdom to grow in faith's exterior, posterior and interior dimensions and discover that although little faith will bring our soul to heaven, great faith will bring heaven to our soul.