

INTRODUCTION: (*Habakkuk 1,2-3. 2,2-4; Lk 17,5-10*) Six hundred years before Christ, the Babylonians were the dominant power in the Middle East with their capital very near modern day Baghdad. The king of Babylon sought to conquer every nation in the Middle East including Israel. For 17 years the Babylonians harassed Israel until they eventually destroyed the Temple and all of Jerusalem. The prophet Habakkuk, who speaks to us in today's first reading, lived during this very difficult period. Habakkuk asked God for relief. God assured him it would come if the people just put their trust in God. However, they didn't. As a result, they spent 50 years in exile in Babylon.

HOMILY: At this point in Luke's gospel, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. Twice now Jesus told his apostles what was going to happen to him. They still did not understand. They were expecting Jesus to expel the Romans from their land and to take over ruling the nation; what they got was far different. Perhaps they had an inkling that not everything in Jerusalem was going to be wonderful when they asked Jesus to increase their faith. Jesus' response implies how little faith they had. He told them they would have to work to grow their faith. They couldn't just put it away in a corner of their house so it's handy to get to in case of an emergency. Even the tiniest amount of faith can do almost impossible things. ("A mulberry tree planted in the sea is strange, to say the least.") (*Anchor Bible, Luke, Fitzmyer, pg. 1144*)

It's not the **amount** of faith that is so important; a mustard seed is about the size of a fly speck; it's the **kind** of faith that's important. For example, it's not enough to have the attitude: "I believe in the existence of God but don't have much time for him." It's good to come to God for help when we are having problems, but we can't always be just connecting with him when we need something. In other words, we can't expect God to be our servant.

The **kind** of faith we all need, it seems to me, is illustrated in the parable in today's gospel. The parable is not condoning slavery; it's just using slavery as an illustration. It's important to understand that a slave had no life of his own; he or she was someone's property. A slave didn't need any thanks for doing what they were expected to do. They just did whatever they were told. God doesn't treat us like this, but the point is, he could. Our very being depends on him and we owe him all that we are.

In his mercy and grace, God has made us his children. I'm sure most of us remember that when we were children we didn't always get what we wanted and when we wanted it. When God doesn't answer us immediately, it's not because he doesn't hear us, it is because, in his love and wisdom, he wants us to wait. Habakkuk was feeling this in today's first reading: "how long, O Lord, I cry for help but you do not listen." The irony was that God was telling his people, through the prophet, exactly what they needed to do in order to be safe – and the people were doing just the opposite of what God was telling them. Also as kids, we learned that sometimes our parents said "no." At times, God also says "no." If we have the right kind of faith, then all we can say is "thy will be done." When God says "no," recall also what St. Paul said: "for those who love God, all things work out for the best." It doesn't always take away my worries or anxieties, but it gives me something to hang on to.

For a lot of people faith is nothing more than going to Mass on Sunday. Faith involves everything we do. The Book of Hebrews says: "faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen." (*Heb. 11,1*) In other words, where there is no faith, there is no

hope. Faith is the foundation for hope. You know how important hope is. Without it our spirits are depressed; we are hopeless. So faith gives us something to hang onto; it gives purpose and meaning to life. It helps us not to give up when life is difficult and challenging. Faith is the firm foundation on which our life is built. Otherwise, our house is built on sand which will give way when storms come our way. Amen.

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time– C Cycle

October 9, 2016

INTRODUCTION – (2 Kings 5, 14-17; 2 Timothy 2, 8-13; Luke 17, 11-19) Israel and Syria (which is north of Israel and Jordan) have been fighting with each other for centuries. Today's first reading takes us back to 850 BC. They were at war then. At that time Syria was called Aram. Our reading is about an Aramean army general named Naaman. He had the dreaded disease of leprosy. His wife had a slave who was a Jewish girl. This slave most probably had been captured in battle. She told her master, Naaman, about a prophet in Israel who would be able to cure his disease. That prophet was Elisha. This proud Aramean general had to really humble himself to go into Israel (enemy territory) to look for Elisha. When he located him, Elisha wouldn't even give Naaman the courtesy of coming to meet with him. He just sent Naaman a message to go and bathe in the Jordan River seven times. This, too, was humiliating and offensive as Naaman considered his gods, his country and the rivers in his country far superior to anything Israel had to offer. Naaman, feeling insulted and offended decided to go back home, but his friends persuaded him to do as the prophet said. Thus our first reading begins. The reading prepares us for the gospel when we hear about Jesus healing 10 people who had leprosy.

HOMILY: How often we forget to say "thank you." We may pray for some favor and if God answers that prayer, we might say a brief "thank you" and then move on to the next thing in our life that we want. But there is much more reason to be thankful than just a few favors every now and then. There are those basic things we may never think to say thanks for: our life, our health, our sight and hearing, our friends and family, our daily bread, our job, our country and our freedom, all the conveniences we enjoy in our modern world, and we could go on and on. We may be saying to ourselves, but I work for all I have. That may be true, but where do we get the strength, the energy, the opportunity, the education, the motivation and all the other things that enable us now or that enabled us in the past, to work. Is spending an hour in Church once a week to say "thank you" too much to ask of a person? Church attendance keeps slipping downward and it is getting to a point that nine out of ten people seem to think giving thanks is too much trouble. I wonder if our Lord is still questioning "Where are the other nine?"

I chose this Sunday with its theme of thanksgiving to present our financial report for the end of the fiscal year. There is a printed report inserted in today's bulletin. I'm only going to focus on a couple of items, so you won't need a copy of the report to understand what I'm saying. On one side is the report on Church finances and on the other side are School finances. I am going to speak on Church finances first. Our fiscal year goes from July 1 to June 30. It is required by the Archbishop that every pastor give a financial report to his parishioners. If we had to depend on our ordinary income and expenses, I would be telling you right now that we came out \$50,000 in the red. Fortunately, we received about \$35,000 that was returned to us from the Capital campaign: One Faith, one hope one love. You may remember a certain percent of what was donated to the campaign was to be returned to the parish for a special parish project, (which I will touch on shortly). That money is specified for our project and cannot be used for general operating expenses. The other item that helped us this year was a couple of bequests which amounted to about \$66,000. So instead of telling you we came up \$50,000 in the red, I

can tell you we ended the fiscal year \$50,000 in the black. We can't get too complacent about this, because some years we get no bequests. I wish to express my thanks to God, to those who remembered us in their will, and to you that we ended the year in good shape financially.

On the other side of the report you will see that our school has done well, too, because a generous bequest of \$172,000. Even without that wonderful bequest, we would have ended the fiscal year about \$12,000 ahead. Most years we go through the year, sitting at school board meetings, worrying over whether we're going to meet expenses or not. But somehow we have always made it. Since I've been here it has become obvious to me that the Lord wants to keep our school open. I am convinced our school is doing good work and God wants our school to be here for the families we serve.

Our special project that is coming from One faith, One hope, One love is to provide more parking closer to the church. No business, no church, no restaurant can thrive without convenient parking. 25 years ago the upper lot was the only place to park. Most people didn't mind, however, since we had a younger population. Our population has aged and most of our people find the lower lot much more convenient. Also, what most people do not consider is that someday, when I have to move on, St. Boniface is not likely to have a full time priest. The pastor here may have one or even two other parishes. To meet his responsibilities, Masses here will have to be combined. That simply means if there's only one or two Masses on Sunday, more people will be looking for a convenient place to park. This was all discussed in the Parish Council and was approved. We just need to wait until more money is returned to us before we do anything. That's pretty much my report. If anyone has any questions, feel free to call and ask for Jenni, our business manager. Thank you again for your generous support.

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time– C Cycle

October 16, 2016

INTRODUCTION – (*Exodus 17, 8-13; 2 Timothy 3,14 – 4,2; Luke 18, 1-8*) As Moses led God's people from slavery in Egypt, through the desert, to the Promised Land, they encountered numerous threats to their lives: the army of Pharaoh, the Reed Sea they had to cross, the lack of water and food in the desert. One such threat was opposition from those peoples whose lands they had to pass through to get where they were going. Today's reading speaks of an attack by Amalek, a desert tribe living south of the Dead Sea. Moses positioned himself on a nearby hill to pray for success in battle. He prayed with his arms held high in petition. As long as he prayed, his prayer was powerful and effective. This story is an encouragement to us to persevere in our prayer, which is also the lesson in today's gospel.

HOMILY – Albert Einstein said the definition of insanity is “doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” Einstein was a very intelligent man and his definition of insanity may be true in many instances. I've used this definition in counseling, especially with addictive behavior. But there are exceptions to Einstein's definition of insanity. Jesus is giving us one exception in today's gospel. The widow woman was in need of receiving a just settlement in a claim. She kept pleading with the judge that she be treated fairly, and eventually he gave in because he thought she might cause him some harm. In desperation the judge wanted to get rid of the widow, and her persistence paid off. Despite the wisdom of Albert Einstein, prayer is also something we cannot discontinue. **Why is that?** That is a question for which everyone wants the answer.

“Why must we not stop praying, even and especially when it seems God is not listening?”
Maybe what we are praying for is not good for us and God in his wisdom and love is protecting

us. Maybe we will develop into spoiled children thinking we should always have our way. Maybe God wants to give us something better. Maybe if we are praying for someone else to change, which is a more complicated kind of prayer, God is trying to move them to a better place, but they are opposing God's grace. My best answer is maybe God wants us to know that he is God and we are not. He wants us to stay aware of our fundamental relationship with God: that he is our Father and we are his children and we need him at all times. Now this is an important lesson that all of us have to learn. When we start thinking we are God, or we could do a better job than God does, then we get into big trouble. Adam and Eve could testify to that.

God, it seems to us, runs his clock a little slower than we do. I believe having to wait for an answer to prayer accounts for about 90% of the reason why people don't pray. Even if it's not the exact blessing we have decided we need, every prayer will bring some blessing to us

I could talk a lot more about prayer, but I'm afraid it would get very complicated. Yet it's not complicated at all. The simple answer of why we should keep on praying without growing tired is because that's how Jesus tells us we should pray. Amen.

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time– C Cycle

October 23, 2016

HOMILY: *(Sirach 35,12-14.16-18; 2 Timothy 4,6-8.16-18; Luke 18,9-14)*

Pharisees were lay people who dedicated themselves to trying to keep God's law as perfectly and as scrupulously as they could. St. Paul was a Pharisee and Jesus had some followers from among the Pharisee party. They performed spiritual practices over and above what the law demanded, and they would have looked down upon anyone who failed to live up to their standards. The prayer of the Pharisee we hear in today's gospel would have been quite typical of such a person. Most probably what the Pharisee said about himself was true.

Then there is the publican, a public employee: although he was Jewish, he worked for the Roman government. The Jews hated the Roman government which held Israel in its power. Rome also required that taxes be sent annually to Rome. This publican made his living as one of the tax collectors. Such individuals were seen as traitors to their own people, and they were seen as thieves as well. They collected what would have been the Roman tax, and they added to this tax an additional tax which became their salary. Often the publicans paid themselves well by collecting enough money for a relatively comfortable life style.

In today's gospel, Jesus tells us about two men, one a publican and one a Pharisee, who went up to the Temple to pray.

I have told this story before, but I think it will help illustrate Jesus' lesson on prayer. Many years ago, when I was first ordained and serving at another parish, a couple came to me with marriage problems. The husband refused to forgive his wife for something she had done. I can no longer remember what it was or how serious it was, but his refusal to forgive made life quite unpleasant for his wife. I spoke to him about forgiveness and one of the things I said was "I'm sure she has had to forgive you for some things you did in the course of your marriage." He said proudly, "I have never done anything that she would have needed to forgive me for." There wasn't much I could say after that. The man was perfect - at least in his own estimation. Maybe he expected to hear angels singing or to hear God congratulating him, but the heavens were quiet and their marriage was soon ended. I admit he might have been a virtuous person, but at that moment it was his pride and arrogance that showed itself. It was a good image of the parable in today's Gospel.

The Pharisee was thinking God must have been very proud of him. He was quite proud of himself. The publican realized he didn't have much to be proud of – he simply asked for God's mercy.

St. Paul, for a long time, thought he was better and holier than almost any other Jew in Palestine. But when Jesus spoke to him, Paul realized that no matter how hard we try, it's God who makes us holy, and that holiness comes from our approaching God with humility and calling on his mercy for our failures. Justification means we are right with God. We don't get right with God by our own power; we are right with God through God's grace. It's as simple as that.

As we begin Mass we pray "Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy." We pray in the Our Father for forgiveness of sins, and at Communion we admit we are unworthy to receive him – yet we know that it's his desire to come into our hearts. Jesus desires for us to live a good life, but it starts with humility and not with the attitude that I'm better than practically anyone else I know. The name "Jesus" means "God saves," and it's only when Jesus' saving love and mercy touches our life that we will know him.

Friends, a few weeks ago I gave this homily. If you were here at Mass that day, you heard it. If you were not here, and there are reasons why some of our parishioners cannot be here on any given Sunday, I want to be sure you see it because it affects our very existence as a parish. I thank those of you who have increased your contributions since my appeal. I understand that many are doing all they can (it seems everything is going up except Social Security and pensions) and so I thank you for the sacrifices you make. If you did not hear this homily, please take a few minutes to read it. Attached is the annual financial report for our parish for your information. It's the same report we distributed in Church on the weekend of Nov. 2/3.

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time– C Cycle

October 30, 2016

HOMILY: A young family went to a nice restaurant for dinner one evening. One of the little boys in the family happened to find a bright shiny dime and was fascinated by it. He put it in his mouth and started to choke on it. The parents became frantic and started calling for anyone to help their choking son. A man at a nearby table came over, turned the boy upside down, gave him a few swats and the dime came out. The parents were so grateful and asked the man "are you a doctor or a medical practitioner?" No the man said, I work for the IRS.

Diocesan policy requires pastors to present the parish finance report to the parish at or near the end of the fiscal year. Well the fiscal year ended on June 30, but with my vacation and knee replacement and other events, this turned out to be the most convenient Sunday for me to present it to you. I always like to choose a Sunday where the readings have something to do with money so my homily doesn't stray too far from the theme of the gospel. Today's gospel has a lot to do with money. Last week we heard about two people who went up to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and one was a Publican. You might recall, I described the publican as a public employee who was basically a tax collector. He collected taxes from his fellow Jews to give to the Romans who ruled over the entire Middle East. Also I explained that when tax collectors collected taxes, they always included something for themselves (determined at their discretion) which provided the tax collector and his family a means of support. Some were very generous toward themselves when they added on the additional tax. Rome didn't care how much they added on as long as Rome got the amount they thought should come to them. Today we hear about a chief tax collector who made quite a comfortable living at his job.

But when he met Jesus, his life changed as it has changed for so many. Honesty and concern for the poor and needy replaced cheating and greed as the dominant driving force in his life. That day salvation came to his house.

When I look at our own finance statement, I have to look at it with a considerable amount of appreciation for what our parishioners do for St. Boniface Church. A couple of years ago we had a drive to increase offerings and it was very successful. It seems to me that this past fiscal year people have continued to donate the amount they had originally pledged. We did end fiscal year 2012-2013 in the red, having \$6100 more in expenses than we had in income, but considering that we had large expenses for renovating the Church, we did quite well. And none of the expenses we had for our renovation had to be paid for out of our savings. That figure of \$6100 represents less than 1% of the entire budget. All this says I am grateful we did so well.

Remember, however, that these are figures from last June. Some of you may have noticed that our Sunday collections recently have been quite a bit less than what we need to meet our expenses. I know that some people are having a difficult time financially. I know that our Sunday attendance has been going down and our population is getting older. This year in October our count was just under 400 people coming weekly to Sunday Mass. That is a drop of 8% from last year. Some people have suggested that we lost people during the renovation while the scaffolds were up, or the floor was torn up, or whatever and they never came back afterwards. But all is not lost. New condos and homes are being built in the neighborhood and, hopefully, some percent of those homes will be occupied by Church-going Catholics who have not yet discovered where we are. I hope they discover us soon because at the rate we are going, we are going to end the fiscal year \$30,000 in the red. That is not so good.

We have to do something or in a few years we will go broke. I am suggesting that everyone increase their weekly donation by about \$3 or \$4 dollars a week. I suspect you will never miss it and I'm sure it will come back to you in some form or another. The Lord is not going to let any of us outdo him in generosity. I've always experienced that. If you can do better, it will be very helpful, because not everyone will be able to make an increase of any kind. I want to end on two positive thoughts, the renovation for the church has been paid for and the church should remain in good condition for quite a few years now (barring any unforeseen catastrophe). Secondly, when we have our big celebration of our anniversary in the spring, that celebration has been paid for by a generous donor. The cost for the celebration is not coming from your Sunday contribution.

I am well aware that most of the people who come to St. Boniface are folks who live outside of Northside. I am also aware that many of our parishioners are very generous. I am often amazed at how generous some people are. I just want to thank you for coming to St. Boniface and thank you for helping to keep us in the business of serving God and serving God's people. Amen.