

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time– C Cycle
October 6, 2013

INRODUCTION: (*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 all the nations that lived 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 asks God for relief. God assures him it will come if the people just put their trust in God. However, they didn't. Everything they did under the leadership of the king in Jerusalem was the exact opposite of what God told them to do. So they spent 50 years in exile in Babylon.

HOMILY: Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. He knew what he would face when he got there. But he had to be faithful to the mission his Father gave him, to preach and heal, to forgive sin and to cast out demons. In today's gospel, we hear about two isolated issues that came up as he and his Apostles journeyed. I will deal with each of these two topics in turn. The first was about faith. The Apostles wanted Jesus to increase their faith. Perhaps they recognized that the jobs that Jesus was giving them required more faith than they had. Jesus seems to have recognized that too, for he told them if they had as much faith as a grain of mustard seed, one of the tiniest of all seeds, they would have more than enough faith to do whatever they needed to do. We can read into Jesus' answer that apparently they didn't have even that much faith. When they asked for more faith, Jesus didn't just reach into his pocket and pull out a neatly wrapped package of faith for each one of them. Faith is not something one can buy in a store or order over the internet. It comes through quiet prayer, through the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, through hearing the word of God and letting it penetrate our minds and hearts and through good works. For example, when we make Mass and Communion an important part of our spiritual life, our faith will grow; when it's something we easily forget about because something more interesting came along to occupy our time, then we will find our faith in Jesus growing weaker. If we want to grow in faith, one very important area to be careful about is the kind of things we say to ourselves. If we say God doesn't hear me, God doesn't care about me, God is too busy for me, we are already doing damage to our faith. If we say to ourselves, I trust that God loves me, I trust God will answer me in some way, I trust that God will not let me down, we are making our faith strong. When the apostles asked for an increase in faith, Jesus couldn't just make it happen because they had things they had to do in their own lives that would cause their faith to strengthen and to grow.

The second part of today's gospel touches on expectations most of us have about God and about how God treats us. God did promise us great rewards if we follow him faithfully, but sometimes we expect those rewards to come more quickly or more abundantly than they seem to and we feel as if God is not being fair. We feel as if we are doing everything we can to please him, but he is not responding to some of the needs we have. Like Habakkuk says in today's reading,

“How long, O Lord, I cry for help but you do not listen.” St. Teresa, in a moment of frustration with God said to God one time: “when you treat your friends the way you do, Lord, it’s no wonder you have so few of them.” In today’s gospel passage, Jesus illustrates his point using the example of slavery. It’s not that he was approving slavery, it was just a common thing at that time and it served to illustrate what he wanted to say. Jesus tells us if someone was wealthy enough to own a slave or two, they simply told their slave what they wanted done and expected it to be done. They didn’t have to praise or thank the slave for whatever the slave did. After all, the slave was someone’s property and the slave simply did what he or she was told. God fully owns us and if God did not give us life and sustain us, we would be nothing. He doesn’t treat us like a piece of property, however, although he has every right too. He chooses to treat us as his children, he loves us and he will bless us. Jesus died for us and he will reward our faithfulness to himself more abundantly than we can imagine; but he still is in control of the blessings and rewards he has for us. This is what our attitude must be as we try to follow him and obey him: that he’s in charge, not you and not me. Or as Jesus put it in the Garden of Gethsemane, “not my will, but thine be done.”

Yesterday/Friday was the feast of St. Francis of Assisi. One day in prayer, Francis heard Jesus speaking to him: “Francis, rebuild my house for it is nearly falling down .” What did Francis do? Did he go out and start recruiting hundreds of followers who would live a life of poverty, chastity and obedience, write a rule for them and form them into a religious order? No – he did nothing like that! Jesus said: “rebuild my church,” so he found churches and chapels in his vicinity that had deteriorated. He replaced bricks that had fallen from the walls of the church and he begged money to buy any materials he needed to do the job right. That is a perfect example of simplicity, humility and obedience of this holy man. He was happy doing what God wanted him to do and he would have been content to do that for the rest of his life. God eventually showed him that rebuilding the Church involved a little more than replacing fallen bricks and stones.

All God wants us to do is to follow him with faith and love. If we do that, God is pleased. He may not always show us his favor or reward us immediately with great blessings. We just need to be satisfied in knowing “we have done what we were obliged to do.” Amen.

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time– C Cycle **October 13, 2013**

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 an Israelite girl who was her slave. This slave was most probably 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. It must have taken a lot of humility and faith for this proud Aramean

general to go into enemy territory (Israel) to look for Elisha. When he located him, Elisha wouldn't even give Naaman the courtesy of coming out of his cave or hut to meet with him. He just told him, through a messenger, to go and bathe in the Jordan River seven times. This, too, was offensive as Naaman considered the rivers in his own country far superior to the Jordan. Naaman was insulted and 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 St. Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, asked a very profound question: "What do you have that you have not received?" (I Cor 4,7) We might want to answer, I've worked hard for what I have. That may be true, but where did you get the energy, the intelligence, the motivation, the skills to be able to accomplish what you did in life? A lot had to be given to us to start with before we could start doing anything on our own. Life itself and everything that came with it is a gift given to us even before we were consulted on the matter.

I know none of us have everything we want, and that's one reason why we are here - to ask God for the things we need. At the same time, we all have been abundantly blessed by having been given so many things that we never even needed to ask for. For those things, we need to give thanks. That is another reason why we are here today - to give thanks.

Luke is the only gospel that tells us about Jesus healing the 10 lepers. The one person who came back to give thanks is so characteristic of our own culture today. Most of us are grateful when God answers a prayer, but how many go out of their way to express that thanks. That is one of the main purposes of the Eucharist, so much so, that the word Eucharist comes from a Greek word which means "Thanksgiving."

Yesterday Joe Webb from Channel 12 came here to St. Boniface and interviewed a few of us so as to do a piece on our porch tour and our 150th anniversary. One of the questions he asked was "what is significant about 150 years of our existence?" That question kept coming back to me the rest of the day. One of the things that is significant about our 150 years is that it showed the dedication the people of this community have toward their faith and toward their parish. Our anniversary has also shown the enduring love God has for his people in this area. Many of my own relatives on my mother's side grew up here, worshipped here, went to school here, were baptized here, married here and were buried here. This loving relationship that has continued for 150 years between God and his people and the support that God's people have shown to this parish is indeed significant. We are celebrating our thankfulness.

One last idea about expressing our thankfulness. Thanksgiving is the key to joy. A person who goes through life with an ungrateful attitude, feeling as if life has been unfair toward them and that life owes them much more than they have received, that person will be a pretty unhappy person. It's the person who knows that God has blessed them, and who has learned to be grateful is the person who is able to be joyful.

All ten people in today's gospel were healed physically. Nine of them went on their way. One of them, however, was touched at a much deeper level in his being and he was converted to Christ and returned to the source of the blessing he received. As we are doing today, he came to Jesus and knelt before the feet of the one who made him whole. Amen

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time– C Cycle
October 20, 2013

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 – Sometimes life doesn't make much sense. Bad things happen, globally, nationally or personally and we wonder why. Is God paying attention, is he too busy to handle all the problems that arise, does he even care? The first book of the Bible, the Book of Genesis, tells us that at the beginning of creation God created a good world and blessed his human creatures with every blessing. But Satan entered the scene and persuaded the first humans to rebel against God. There is so much evil and suffering in the world because we keep following in the footsteps of our ancestors – thinking we're smarter than God and we don't need to do what he tells us. Indeed in ignoring God, we bring many of our problems on ourselves. We also find that even when we do everything God wants us to do, things do not always work out well. Jesus is the perfect example of that; he lived a perfect life and he was condemned as a criminal and nailed to a cross. When bad things happen, especially to good people, we ask "what kind of a God do we have?" Many people have concluded there is no God or, if there is, he doesn't care about me. Their image of God is that God must be like the unjust judge in today's parable: God is unfair and uncaring.

Jesus came to tell us: "No, that's not the way God is." God is caring, God is loving, God hears us and God will answer us. The one problem is that God doesn't always answer us in the way we would like or as quickly as we would like. Contrasting God with the unjust judge, Jesus said at the end of his parable: God "will see to it that justice is done for (his chosen ones) speedily." God views time differently than we do. We want God to see things our way, rather than our being willing to see things his way. Here is where faith comes in, because faith is the willingness to see things his way, the way he has revealed himself to us in Jesus. This is what faith is, to view things as God views them,

and because we cannot see everything as clearly as God does, we take God's word for why things are the way they are.

One thing God didn't tell us is why we need to keep on asking for what we need. Jesus tells us we should pray like this poor widow and not stop praying. I remember when I was young, if I asked my parents for something and they said "no," I'd better not ask again. Jesus is telling us to keep on asking. Surely God knows what we need, surely God is not going to forget when we ask for something – remember Jesus told us all the hairs on our head are numbered – he knows every little detail about us. Spiritual writers have given many answers to this question of why we are to keep on asking. They all agree we don't need to keep on asking to keep God informed, but that somehow we need to keep on praying because we are changed thru prayer. We discover more fully our dependence on God as our provider and father; we discover that maybe God has better plans for us; we discover God's providential care and love. For whatever reason, prayer develops our relationship with God and changes us; it does not change God.

Jesus asks at the end of today's gospel: "when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" The answer of course is "yes" he will find faith in those who haven't given up praying – for faith will always be found in those who pray and vice versa. Amen.

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time– C Cycle October 27, 2013

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 as they could. St. Paul was a Pharisee and Jesus had some followers from among the Pharisee party. They held various theological viewpoints in opposition to the Sadducees (who were the priestly class), Although the gospels tell us a great deal about the opposition between Jesus and the Pharisees, it is interesting to note that it was not so much the Pharisees who fought to have Jesus put to death, it was the Sadducees. The prayer of the Pharisee we hear in today's gospel would have been very characteristic of the prayer of any Pharisee and most probably what the Pharisee said about himself was true. He would have been strict about keeping the law, he would have performed spiritual practices over and above what the law demanded and he would have looked down upon anyone who failed to live up to his standards.

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

In today's gospel, we hear of two men, a publican and a Pharisee who went up to the Temple to pray. 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.

I would suspect 98 % of us here today are puzzled by this parable. Like the Pharisee most of us can probably say: "I feel as if I'm a pretty good person, I try to keep the Commandments, I try to help my neighbor, I even say the rosary occasionally, I drop my collection envelope in the basket every week or every month. I'm glad I'm not like a lot of other people I know." After the Pharisee listed all his good qualities, Jesus tells us he did not get right with God. So where did he go wrong? All the things he did were good things, except maybe for his thinking he was better than most everyone else. He forgot one important element in the spiritual life. It begins with humility. It begins with knowing that God is the source of our justification. It begins with the awareness that it is God who saves us. As a Pharisee, St. Paul, who for a time thought himself superior to those who believed in Christ, tells us later in his life in his Letter to the Romans: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3,23) Two chapters later he emphasizes it: "Death spread to all humans because all people sinned." (Rom. 5,12) None of us escape the guilt of sin and being humble enough to admit that and to ask God's mercy is the first and most important step to be right with God. That's where the Pharisee in today's parable got off the right track, he was full of pride at his own self-righteousness rather than being grateful for the righteousness of God. I wonder if those who have given up going to Mass have lost this awareness that our holiness and justification begins with a humble recognition of our need for God's mercy. You might notice that's the way Mass begins. By acknowledging we are not perfect when we approach God, we approach him in need of God's mercy.

Does all this mean we do not need to worry about keeping the Commandments or doing good works. Jesus stresses how important that is in so many passages in the Scriptures, but today, the gospel tells us how we are to begin our approach to God.

Do you wonder if there is any hope for the Pharisee who tried to serve God with such fidelity all his life. Certainly! There is always the hope that he would eventually look deep into his own heart and realize how self-centered, pompous, judgmental and ungrateful he was in life. Maybe then he would do more than say thank you God that I'm better than everyone else. He might recognize that he is like everyone else, in need of God's saving love and grace for only Jesus is our Savior.