

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time C

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“If I just had more faith....” I think most of us have struggled with that at some point in our lives. If I just had more faith, I would not have so many questions or doubts. If I just had more faith, God would answer my prayers. If I just had more faith, he would not have died; she would have recovered. If I just had more faith, I would be more involved in the church. If I had just more faith, I would be a better person, a better parent, and a better spouse. If I had more faith, I would know what to do and handle things better. If I just had more faith, life would be different.

It is an approach to faith at least as old as the apostles’ own faith. It is the approach they have taken in today’s gospel. **“Increase our faith,”** they ask Jesus. Jesus has just warned them not to become stumbling blocks to others and enjoined them to forgive as often as an offender repents, even if it is seven times in one day. That would not be easy. It will be a challenge to live that way. **“Increase our faith,”** is their response. It seems like a reasonable request. If a little is good, a lot must be better. If McDonald’s can supersize our fries and drinks, surely Jesus can supersize our faith.

The request to increase our faith, the belief that if I had more faith, things would be different, reveals, at best, a misunderstanding of faith itself and, at worst, demonstrates our own unfaithfulness. Jesus is very clear that faithfulness is not about size or quantity. **“If you had faith the**

size of a mustard seed,” he says, “you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”

Faith is not given to us in a packet to be spent as currency in our dealings with God. Faith is not measured by how difficult the task or work before us is. Faith is not something we have or acquire. Faith is a relationship of trust and love. It means opening ourselves to receive another’s life and giving our life to another. That other one is Jesus the Christ. That one faith-relationship is determinative of who we are and how we live.

Faith is not about giving intellectual agreement to a particular doctrine or idea. Faith is not about how much or how strongly we believe in Jesus’s words or actions. When we speak about a married couple’s faithfulness, we do not mean they believe or agree with each other’s ideas or even a particular understanding of marriage. They are faithful because they have committed themselves to each other in love and trust. They are loyal because they continually give their life to the other and receive the other’s life as their own. They are faithful because they carry with them that one relationship wherever they go, in all that they are and all that they do. Therefore, it is in our faith relationship with Jesus.

Faith, however, will not change the circumstances of our lives. Instead, it changes us. Living in faith does not shield us from the pain and difficulties of life, it does not undo the past, and it will not guarantee a particular future. Rather, faith is the means by which we face and deal

with the circumstances of life – the difficulties and losses, the joys and successes, the opportunities and possibilities.

Faith does not get us a pat on the back, a reward, or a promotion in God’s eyes. It is simply the way in which we live and move and have our being so that, at the end of the day, the faithful ones can say, without pride or shame, **“We have done only what we ought to have done!”** Nothing more and nothing less. We have lived in openness to, trust in, and love for Christ. We have allowed him to guide our decisions, our words, and our actions. He has sustained us in both life and death.

Faith, however, is not lived out in the abstract. It is practiced day after day in ordinary everyday circumstances. Some days when the pain and heaviness of life seem more than we can carry, it is by faith, relationship with Jesus, that we get up each morning and face the reality of life. Other days present other circumstances. When we feel the pain of the world and respond with compassion by feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, speaking for justice, when we experience the brokenness of a relationship and offer forgiveness and mercy, when we see the downtrodden and offer our presence and prayers — in all those we have lived, seen, and acted by faith. Then there are days when we feel powerless, lost, and unsure of the way forward. By faith, we sit in silence and wait.

Faith, then, is how we live; the lens through which we see ourselves, others, and the world; the criterion by which we act and speak. Faithfulness means that no matter where we go, no matter what

circumstances we face, we do so in relationship with the One who created, loves, sustains, and redeems us, the One who **“abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”**

Jesus does not supersize our faith. It is not necessary. We live by faith, not because we have enough faith, but because we have faith, any faith, even mustard-seed-sized faith. That is all we need. Jesus believes that. So should we.

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The question is not how much faith we have, but rather how we are living the faith we do have. How is our faith, our relationship with Jesus, changing our lives, our relationships, the lives of others? If it is not, more of the same will surely make no difference. The mustard seed of faith is already planted within us. It is Christ himself. He has withheld nothing from us. We already have enough. We are already enough. We do not need more faith. We need more response to the faith, the Christ, the mustard seed, and the relationship we already have. **Amen.**