

Homily of Fr. Christopher Wyvill at the Abbey on the 27th Sunday of the Year, Oct. 6, 2019

Gospel reading: Luke 17, 5-10.

The apostles asked Jesus, **“Increase our faith.”** They had reason to, just as sometime I do. More than once Jesus had scolded one or all of them or the crowd with them with his protest, **“Oh, you of little faith.”** The apostles and disciples had heard Jesus praise the faith of those who came to him asking for healings and deliverances for themselves or for others. Jesus was amazed at the extraordinary faith of the centurion who believed that simply by a command Jesus could heal his sick servant back home, or the woman with the hemorrhage of blood wanting to just touch the hem of his garment. Jesus had many occasions to say, **“Your faith has saved you.”** When there was a lack of faith, he could not do many miracles, as was the case with his antagonistic townsmen in Nazareth.

It is one thing to believe that God bestows powers of healing and deliverance on certain men and women, as he did on the prophets, on Jesus, and on the disciples and saints after him. It is another to believe what St. Peter professed when Jesus asked his apostles, **“Who do you say that I am?”** Peter said, **“You are Christ, the Son of the living God.”** **“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.”**

With that we are in a whole new dimension of faith. Do you believe that God the Son became a man like us in all things but sin, in order to save us from the drastic effects of our sinning? That takes the kind of faith defined in the letter to the Hebrews. **“Faith is confident assurance concerning what we hope for, and conviction about things we do not see.”** Remember St. Thomas insisted on seeing the risen Jesus in order to believe in his resurrection. When Jesus appeared and he believed, with his **“My Lord, and my God!”** Jesus told him blessed are those who do not see, yet believe.

St. Paul writes that this kind of faith comes through hearing. It is not something arrived at by mere human reason and powers of intellect or even witnessing those healing miracles. Things unseen and hoped for we can believe to be real, when based on the trustworthiness of God’s revelations. God is truly concerned for our earthly and eternal good. It began millennia ago with his call of Abraham, our father in faith, and the promise of a progeny more numerous than the stars.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews goes from eulogizing Abraham’s faith in God’s promises to tell about the faith of Jacob, Moses, Gideon, David and Samuel, the prophets and still others. But in conclusion he writes, **“Yet despite the fact that all of these were approved because of their faith, they did not obtain what had been promised. God had made a better plan, a plan which included us.”**

We are the beneficiaries of that plan. It is most fully revealed by God’s sending of his Son to be our Savior, and by the gift of the Holy Spirit sent to dwell within us, guiding us in all truth. In those momentous historical events God definitively demonstrates his love for us when Jesus obediently offered his bodily life as a sacrifice on the cross to obtain the forgiveness of our sins. Without these revelations we would be faced with an utterly unknowable God who dwells in light inaccessible.

God wants to give the gift of faith to everyone, but we have to be open to living with the risks it involves. There is the obligation of obedience to God's commandments, guidelines for a good life, because they require denying self in order to put others and God first. Then there are the mysteries of our faith that the intellect must assent to, based on God's word alone. It is not without its challenges. In the Catechism we read, **"... faith is often lived in darkness and can be put to the test. Our experiences of evil and suffering, injustice and death seem to contradict the Good News; they can shake our faith, and become a temptation against it."** We have to counteract those threats with the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Just go to the letter to the Romans at the end of chapter 8 where Paul affirms that nothing, nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. It is true just as Paul wrote, **"We walk by faith, not by sight. Our knowledge is imperfect. Now we see indistinctly, as in a clouded mirror."** St. Augustine and St. Anselm emphasize that faith has to come first in order to understand God's plans and ways.

Jesus once asked his hearers, **"When the Son of Man comes will he find faith?"** I hope he will find faith in us when our turn comes to meet him. It helps if we follow the advice in Hebrews where it urges us, **"Let's persevere in running the race....while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith."** Thank you Jesus! To him with the Father and the Holy Spirit let us give our thanks, praise, honor, and humble obedience now and forever. AMEN