

**Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C  
(Oct. 3, 2004)**

***Uprooting Sycamores***

You must have detected the same common theme in the readings that I did. They all talk about faith. So, just for a few minutes let's reflect, pray, and ponder the meaning of faith and its consequences in our lives.

In the first reading we hear the prophet Habakkuk crying to the Lord, "How long, O Lord? I cry for help but you do not listen! I cry out to you 'Violence!' but you do not intervene. Why do you let me see ruin? Why must I look at misery? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife and clamorous discord." And how does the Lord answer the prophet? "The just man shall live because of his faith." That's it. As far as the prophet is concerned, faith is the answer. Not always a satisfying response. I wonder how people today who are daily suffering the consequences of disasters, dangers, and difficulties would react to such a suggestion. Think of all the people who are experiencing the effects of terrorism in our world or natural disasters such as hurricanes. Maintaining faith in a place like Haiti today must be extremely difficult.

The Letter to Timothy tells this young bishop how he is to act in service to his people and winds up saying, "Guard the rich deposit of faith with the help of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us."

In the Gospel passage Luke tells us that the apostles asked Jesus to increase their faith. His response seems to indicate they thought that if they had more faith they could do bigger, better, and more important things for the Lord. But Jesus tells them it's not the quantity of faith they have. It's the quality. Even with a tiny bit, if it's sincere, you can do great things. "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed," he says, "you can say to this sycamore, 'Be uprooted and transplanted into the sea,' and it would obey you." In Matthew's Gospel the hyperbole is even greater, "You could tell this mountain to move and it would."

Well, is that what our faith is supposed to be all about? Transplanting trees and moving mountains? Hardly. But to the people experiencing the kinds of disasters I mentioned earlier it might sometimes seem that way.

Our faith basically is about living in the presence of God all the time and responding to the love that God has first shown each and every one of us.

Elie Wiesel, a Jewish philosopher and writer, tells a story about himself and another man who both, as children, survived the Nazi death camps in Germany where most of their friends and family were executed. The man said to Wiesel, "After all that has happened to us, all the hatred, the persecutions, and the executions, how can you continue to believe in God?" Elie Wiesel's response was, "After all that has happened to us, the hatred, the persecutions, and the executions, how can you not believe in God? Through it all I still believed in the love of God and it was this belief that helped me to survive. Just as it is this belief that has helped our people to survive through all the centuries of hatred and persecution."

That belief, of course, was an expression of his faith, a faith that we say comes to us in Baptism but which God obviously can bestow in other ways as well. And what does this gift do? It enables us to commit ourselves to God in love and service. We are able to say all those things we will say later in our profession of faith, which is really a statement of fundamental Christian beliefs, because we have the gift of faith. That is, we have a commitment to the God of Jesus Christ. And this commitment involves not just words, but actions, indeed it means giving our lives to God in whatever way is most appropriate. Remember what Jesus said, "Not everyone who says, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but the one who does, *who does*, the will of my Father."

Sometimes, you know, we are like the apostles. We look at the saints or people we think are holy and how they live and we say, "Well if I had their faith, I would be able to do the things that they do." And so we use our own weakness and perhaps our lack of faith as an excuse for avoiding the difficult things God has asked us to do, like loving our neighbor as ourselves or helping others who are weaker or less fortunate than we are or not giving in to bitterness and a desire for revenge or simply despair in the wake of terrorism or natural disasters.

I am reminded of a story that is told about Dorothy Day. You remember her or at least have heard of her, I'm sure. In her youth she lived a pretty wild life, then she had a conversion experience that changed her life completely, so much so she came to be considered by many a living

saint. She started all kinds of activities for the poor: a newspaper, *The Catholic Worker*, which is still being published, houses of hospitality for homeless people, feeding programs, Christian communal farms, and so on.

Sometimes people would tell her she was a saint and she would get upset by this, especially if these people just came to admire but not to do anything. She used to say, “You think I do these things because I am holier than you are. But that’s not true. I am no holier than anybody else. And there’s no reason in the world why you can’t do the same things. So stop trying to use my so-called holiness as an excuse for not helping people who need your help.”

Well, in spite of her holiness she was very human – or maybe it was her holiness that helped make her human. At any rate even saints can lose their patience sometimes. It was her faith, of course, that allowed her to persevere, to continue her difficult work in spite of obstacles, problems, opposition, even by the Cardinal Archbishop of New York. But her faith told her she was doing what God was calling her to do.

And the same thing can be true for us. What God is calling us to do is not always easy. Indeed sometimes it can be very difficult. But even with just a tiny, tiny bit of faith, we can do it. We can, metaphorically at least, uproot sycamores and move mountains