

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 17:5-10

A small congregation built a new church on a piece of land left to them by a church member. Ten days before the new church was to open, the local building inspector informed the pastor that unless the number of parking spaces doubled, they would not be able to use the new church. Unfortunately, the new building had used every square centimeter, except for a rather steep hill behind the church. In order to build more parking spaces, they would have to move that rocky hill. Undaunted, the pastor announced the next Sunday morning that he would meet that evening with all members who had “mountain moving faith”. They would hold a prayer session, asking God to remove the mountain from the back yard, and to somehow provide enough money to have it paved, before the scheduled opening dedication service.

At the appointed time, twenty-four of the congregation’s three hundred members assembled for prayer. They prayed for nearly three hours. At ten o’clock the pastor said the final “Amen”.

“We’ll open next Sunday as scheduled,” he assured everyone, “God has never let us down before, and I believe he will be faithful this time too”.

The next morning, as the pastor was working in his study, there came a loud knock at his door and a rough looking construction foreman entered. “Excuse me, Reverend, I’m from the Construction Company that’s building the shopping mall. We need some fill, in fact, heaps of fill. Would you be willing to

sell us a chunk of that rocky hill behind the church? We'll pay you for the dirt we remove and pave all the exposed area, free of charge. We need to do this now to allow it to settle properly".

The little church was dedicated the next Sunday as originally planned.

That is exactly what Jesus was talking about in our Gospel for today. The disciples had a problem. You might say they had their own mountain that needed moving. So they come to Jesus with all this on their minds and say, "Make our faith greater so that we will be able to do the things that you have asked of us".

They felt that an increase in their faith would enable them to move the mountain that was getting in the way of their faithful discipleship.

What does Jesus do? How does He answer their prayer? Does He lay His hands upon them and pray to give them more faith?

Does He snap His fingers and grant them a double dose of His Spirit and faith? Does He give them 'mountain moving faith' so that they could remove all obstacles that got in their way? No, He doesn't. Instead He says to them, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you".

The point Jesus is making is that they have already been given faith. Even a tiny faith, the size of a mustard seed, is enough as far as God is concerned. The size of faith doesn't matter, because God is the one doing the moving.

So, what Jesus is saying to His disciples, who asked for their faith to be increased, is that even if they have the smallest amount of faith, they can do great things. Even the smallest faith can grasp what God has, and is doing in our lives; even the smallest faith is able to recognise the ways that God is able to

make changes in our lives and our world, through us.

We have people in our Parishes who are living through, or have lived through very difficult times, and no doubt many of us have thought about the great faith they must have to live through and come out of their troubles as well as they have. We may even have said to them, with respect and admiration, ‘I don’t think I could have faced what you have faced. I admire your great faith’. In response to this, many people say, “My faith is no greater than anyone else’s. I just didn’t know what faith I had until I needed it. If it wasn’t for God helping me, I wouldn’t have made it

.”

Jesus didn’t need to increase the size of the faith of the disciples, they already had faith. He assures them of that, and states that, even though their faith may be small, God can accomplish great things through them. And we know that He did. They went on to share the Good News about Jesus, even in the face of some strong opposition, being brought before rulers and judges, being imprisoned and killed. It wasn’t about how great their faith in God was, but rather it was about what their faith was focussed on.

There are times when our confidence, perhaps even over confident faith, is brought crashing down because of what is happening in our lives. There are times when our faith seems so weak in the face of gigantic threats to our health, our family, our self-worth. But, no matter what size and strength we consider our faith to be at any given moment, faith as small as a mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds, is able to uproot a mulberry tree, which has an extensive root system, and plant, not dump it, plant it in the sea and still expect it to bear mulberries.

To help us understand this story a little better, here is a story told by an ordained minister about his cousin: My cousin and his wife were parents of a child with Downs Syndrome, and they asked their minister whether their child would have enough understanding and faith to be confirmed, and to receive Holy Communion. The Minister told them he wasn't particularly concerned about understanding. He went on to say that their child may never be able to express what he believed in words, but as far as God is concerned, a faith the size of a mustard seed is all that is needed for him to be able to do great things in their child's life. What a joy it was for all those in their church, especially his parents, to see that child's outstretched hands waiting to be filled with the love of God through the body and blood of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

Never forget that we already possess more than enough of what's needed to change our life, our heart, our family, our community, even our world. In our Gospel reading for today, we are not being asked how much faith we have, but rather what are we doing with the faith that God has already given us? So, what's our response?

AMEN.