

Commentary to the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

Faith Transforms Crises into Challenges.



Horrible things were happening at the time that Habakkuk wrote our first reading for this week. Habakkuk lived around 650 years before the Lord. It was a time of violence. The Babylonians had conquered the Assyrians and were threatening or attacking the rest of the world, including the Kingdom of Judah. The Jews themselves were continually assaulting each other. Hatred and violence were part of life, even accepted. So, Habakkuk cried out to the Lord: "Lord, are you unaware of what is happening? We are all going to be killed! And the Lord responds: "Have faith" The just one because of his faith will live. "The world is going to hell in a handbasket," the senior citizen complains. Government policies reflect an anti-Christian bias. People are struggling, but refusing to do anything about their problems, expecting others to bail them out.

The world is at the brink of war. And if the senior can't find enough to be concerned with, there are plenty of emails and alerts in the media to keep him on edge. What's going to happen to us, to our country, to the world? And the Lord responds: "Live as a just person, one united to me. Have faith, and you will live."

School seems harder to survive than ever, for the students and their parents. High school is particularly difficult, but so are middle school with the advent of adolescence and college with the changes that independence brings. Students are either attacked for their faith or pressured to join in with those who live as though they have no faith. Nothing is more difficult for a teenager than having to lose friends, but how can they keep their faith and be part of the faithless? So, the Teen calls out to God, "How can I keep you and be happy at school" And the Lord responds, "Just live united to me, and have faith. It will all work out. The just will live by faith alone."

People come to Church and often hear the message of Respect Life, particularly on this Sunday, the

first Sunday of October, Respect Life Sunday. Many find this issue difficult because the atheistic and anti-theistic have their positions strengthened by people who claim to be people of faith but who choose positions against life. Let's face it, we all know people who are good people but who don't understand the importance of the Catholic position of respect life from womb to tomb, and who therefore embrace the fiction of being pro-choice Catholics. They are making the decision to ignore the Natural Law. The Natural Law, the Law of reason, demands that life be respected.

There is also the opposite extreme. There are those who feel that life issues should be the sole concern of the Church. Some of these people are upset at the words of Pope Francis when he stated that life issues are not the only concerns of the Church. They are a major concern, but not the only concerns. The every day Catholic comes to Church the first Sunday of October, is confronted with these issues and says: "This can all be confusing. What should I do? How should I react?"

And the Lord responds: "It is not that difficult. Just stay united to me, be just, be righteous, and have faith. Then you will live." "Increase our faith, Lord," the disciples ask Jesus. And He responds, "Trust me". There are many challenges in our lives. There are many crises we have to face. One family is struggling to keep the marriage together. A second family is facing chronic sickness. A third family has a child that needs continual emotional support. A fourth family faces unemployment. A fifth family will forever grieve the death of a loved one. And, we in the face of violence, ruin, misery, destruction, strife, wonder if God is aware of our plight?

The readings for today are saying, "God is aware. Now have faith." It sounds so simple. Have faith. It is certainly easy to say, "Have faith." But when the doctor says the conditional is permanent, and the world is coming down around us, it is really hard to have faith. Well, let me rephrase that, "It is hard to have faith amid the crises of our lives, unless faith has become our lifestyle." One of the wonderful gifts of the priesthood is the continual exposure the priest has to you, people of faith. The way that you live your faith life is a blessing for me. When I became a priest, it was so I could help people become people of faith. I now realize that this goes both ways.

You help me be a person of faith, or, at least try to live as a man of faith. Many times I go into a home or into a hospital room where a person is dying. I'm sure you would think that this must be a terrible scene. It is not. People of faith, in the midst of tears, are most often ready to let go and trust God to care for their loved one. Many times the dying person himself or herself has such a deep faith that he or she radiates a peace. As a priest I am blessed to be among people whose faith is so strong that they serve the Lord even in crises. These same people have spent their lives saying their prayers, performing acts of Christian charity, receiving the sacraments and living their convictions.

Their faith life is so strong in their daily lives that it is their support in their times of crises. And it is easy for them to have faith because they are people of faith. We come to Church today seeking faith. We do this every time we pray, but particularly as a faith community receiving the Word of God in Scripture and Eucharist. We ask God to help us to serve him in every aspect of our lives. We ask God to help us to raise our children to be people who joyfully serve their God. We pray that we might a faith life that is so strong that the difficulties and crises we face will be challenges more than crises, opportunities for us to place our trust in God. And we remember Habakkuk, for the just, because of their faith, shall live.

Fr. Joseph Pellegrino, SJ