

27th Sunday Ord. Time (C)
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes
October 1, 2, 2016

When you see God face to face, what is the first question you might want to ask? I remember visiting an elderly lady from time to time, (I think she was about 94). One time I visited her in the hospital, and during our conversation she mentioned that when she says her prayers at night, she always tells God to go a bit easier with her the next day. But then she added, "God doesn't seem to listen to me." When she sees God face to face, she might want to ask about God's not listening to her. Again, what will be the question you will want to ask?

Today's Liturgy of the Word starts off with a very striking and detailed reading from the prophet Habakkuk. The time frame for Habakkuk is quite short 8 years but they are very significant years the 8 years just prior to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. So they were years filled with political intrigue and idolatry in the small Kingdom of Israel. It was a very confusing and difficult time. Habakkuk uses the first 2 chapters of his prophecy to have a dialogue with God, just like you and I do when we pray, and just like the 94 year old lady I saw in the hospital does. And for what may be the first time in Israelite literature, the man Habakkuk questions the ways of God. Habakkuk calls God to account for his government of the world. We heard from these chapters today:

*"Why do you let me see ruin; why must I look at misery?
Destruction and violence are before me ... I cry out to you
"Violence!", but you do not intervene."*

It would not take any of us very long to make a list of things that we may feel God is not giving due attention to today. It might be especially easy in a political season such as we are in. The front page of any newspaper is a good start. Add to this all of our personal concerns: our sick, our struggling family members, our stressed out lives.

October is traditionally pro-life month, and so as we head into this month we are also aware of the variety of pro-life issues that need attention: beginning of life issues, end of life issues, as well as all the in-between issues war, capital punishment, sexual and emotional abuse of people, hunger, human trafficking, etc. They go on and on. We ourselves may want to say to God, *"Why do you let us see ruin; why must we look at misery? Destruction and violence are before us ... We cry out to you "Violence!", but you do not intervene."*

It is fair to say that destruction and violence are before us. But it is not fair to say that God does not intervene. The Good News is that God has indeed intervened by sending us a Savior, his own son. This intervention of God is so miraculous and wondrous, that

we find it hard to believe, and even more difficult to acknowledge. It is simply not true that God does nothing for us. To the contrary, God has done everything for us. As today's Gospel text teaches, we do not need more faith, we simply need to acknowledge and live the faith that we already have been given. If lived, it would *“uproot a mulberry tree and plant it in the sea.”* God has done more for us than we know and accept.

The secret to our situation lies in the first couple lines of today's second Scripture: *“I remind you, to stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands.”* When we were baptized, we were each gifted with faith and the very life of God. This faith and the life of God must be stirred into flame. We know to do this when sitting around a campfire or a fireplace: from time to time we stir the coals into flame. The same must be done with our faith. It is not that we have none; we need to stir it into flame. And a faith on fire will begin to bring about many of the things that we spend a good deal of time wishing God would do for us. Actually, that God has already done for us. Now we must accept what God has done. Hear some more of the words of today's Habakkuk selection:

“Then the Lord answered and said: Write down the vision clearly upon the tablets, so that one can read it readily. For the vision still has its time, presses on to fulfillment, and will not disappoint; if it delays, wait for it, it will surely come, it will not be late.”

God is with us every day. We must keep the vision of God stirred into flame. Even when it seems that it is slow in coming, wait for it. It will surely come; the vision and plan of God has its time and will not disappoint.

This is a very good thing to keep in mind as we work for pro-life issues. Too often, I think, we get bogged down and even divided from one another on issues. We don't all agree on individual issues, but we can find agreement and strength on the larger goal of life itself. Divided we lose the battle. Some can work for an end to abortion; others can work for an end to capital punishment. Some can work for an end to poverty, and others can work for better care of the ill, the physically and the mentally challenged. We don't need to, nor do we have the energy to work for everything. But we must not oppose those who work for some issue of life that happens not to be our own issue. It is like what we reflected on a few weeks ago it may even be an 'act of mercy'. Maybe it is even possible to bring some of these sides together by each of us working for our own issue and at the same time letting others work for these. The issue of life is larger than my particular interest. And it is 'life that we must be about'.

The vision is whole, the vision is God's. God has acted, and given us faith and the vision. Stir it into flame.