

Faith is a VERB!

Prayers evolve from particular events happening in our lives. If we are gathered around a dining room table with family for a meal we will offer a prayer of thanksgiving. The sickness of a loved one stirs a prayer of petition. Standing in a quiet forest, or on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico, evokes prayers of praise and awe. After a difficult time in our life has ended our prayer turns to gratitude. When we have messed up we pray for mercy. Our life situations is the source of our prayer and so most often prayer isn't generic, but very specific.

So, from the Gospel today the question arises: **what was going on to cause the disciples to ask Jesus to, "Increase our faith"?** When we pray a prayer like that it might be because life is testing us and we fear our faith will falter; or is not strong enough to match the trials we face. I am sure the disciples like us must have thought that way given all the hard lessons and learning the true cost of discipleship Jesus has been teaching us on the way to Jerusalem. Remember the 10 lessons we learned this summer?

I believe that that it is easy to fall into the trap that faith means believing certain tenets. If I want more faith is it so that I can hold more firmly to the "truths of our Catholic faith?" Or, that if we have enough faith our lives will be secure – that is Never a promise of Jesus!

What might help us understand the role of faith in our lives would be to think of faith, not as a noun, not something we stand on, but as a verb stirring us to act.

Thinking our faith lacks sufficient size might keep us from doing what we are called to do. The disciples must have thought their faith was so small they couldn't act on it. **But Jesus wants his disciples to trust and act on their faith - to do faith.**

When we **fail to act on Faith or Trust our in Faith we hear folks saying things like:** I can't take on that responsibility, I don't have enough faith. I can't be kind to those people, that will take more faith than I have. I can't stop drinking, I'm not strong enough. The disciples may have felt similar inhibitions after hearing what Jesus just taught – about not leading others

into sin and the necessity to forgive someone seven-seven times, not building up treasure here but treasures in heaven, the care for the poor and dying.

But Jesus teaches, "Act on the faith you that has been given to you. You'll be surprised what you can do." His example of the deep-rooted mulberry tree underlines his lesson about the power of even the smallest seed of faith to work marvels.

Jesus teaches in parables, so we know he wasn't speaking literally, but we sense what he saying: he's calling for trust; asking his disciples to avoid leading others to sin (vv. 1-2) and to forgive a person, even for the same offense (17:4). He is teaching that what he asks is not impossible as it first seems, if his followers act with even the smallest bit of faith. If we have that faith we can do whatever we must as Jesus' disciples. Following him asks much of us; but the faith we have, no matter how small it feels, is enough to act on. Remember: faith is a verb stirring us to act.

In his parable Jesus gives the **example of a slave** who waits on table after a hard day in the fields. They have just done what they were supposed to do, hence they deserve no special credit. We may find ourselves doing something that surprises us. i.e., a great act of charity; hard labor on another's behalf; or, a magnanimous act of forgiveness. Such deeds often win praise among those around us. **But despite the remarkable things we disciples might do, we are to acknowledge the source of all our good deeds – the mustard seed faith planted in us by God.** Realizing this we can say with those servants in the parable: "We are unprofitable servants, we have done what we were obliged to do." We could also add: "We have only done what our mustard seed faith has enabled us to do."

Mustard seed **faith is planted in us at our baptism.** It is watered and cultured by family, friends and the worshiping community and so it grows.

**But remember and realize great faith (in its essence) is already contained in the mustard seed.** We tend to be preoccupied by size and quantity. We presume that we need a lot of faith to tackle the important issues in our lives and the world around us. This preoccupation can limit our response.

Blessed Francis Xavier, put his faith into action throughout his life-time. Desiring to be a priest, a missionary, a teacher, a pastor, a comfort to the sick and dying.

So let us have faith! And put that faith into action for the Good of the Kingdom establish by our Lord Jesus Christ.