

Looking ahead to the readings today, I realized there really isn't anything that new in here we don't already know. But then I thought, that's not a bad thing. We need to be reminded on those things we hold true to help solidify our faith and perhaps that in turn can be a source of hope and joy. Let's find out.

You know who's not joyful: Habukkuk. Habukkuk, I love saying his name. Sounds like a type of fish my mom would have ordered in a restaurant. Anyway, Habukkuk is that minor prophet we heard from in our first reading today. Starts off with a bit of gloom and doom, doesn't it? Not surprisingly, for anyone living in the Northern Kingdom of Israel at that time, things were going from bad to worse. Did you know they never had a "good" king in the Northern Kingdom? In the south, in Judah, they had the worst of the bunch but also a few good kings. In the north, it was just a slow and steady decline until they were conquered by the Assyrians. And now, at the time of Habukkuk, the Babylonians were

threatening to invade and make it even worse. So, our friend, Habukkuk, calls out to the Lord. Note: this is just me paraphrasing

Habukkuk essentially says, “Hey Lord, we’re dying here. A little help? Sooner than later, please!” And the Lord replies, “Habukkuk, get ready to write this down. And if it comes slowly, wait for it. If you all react rashly, on your own, you have no chance. If, on the other hand, you act justly, with integrity, having faith in me, you shall live.” It seems like **faith** is the key. Isn’t it always.

Prior to today’s gospel passage from Luke, the apostles are starting to feel that becoming a follower of Jesus and getting into this kingdom of God that He keeps preaching about might just be a bit more than they bargained for. They started to doubt themselves and *maybe* even Jesus. They got scared. So, they ask Jesus to “increase their faith”. But Jesus replies that it’s not a question of more. Even faith the size of a tiny mustard seed could do more than they could ever imagine. It’s not a question of how much, but how genuine and *solid* that faith is.

Do we really trust in the Lord? Do we believe He will be there when we need Him most? Are we willing to stand on the foundation of our faith and trust in God when we need to? It's not always easy, that's for sure.

A little over 20 years ago. Holy Spirit church had a relationship with a mission church down in East St. Louis, Illinois. In case you don't know, East St. Louis is a pretty poor and rough community just across the river from St. Louis. We used to send teams of parishioners down there in the summer on mission trips, one of which I was a part. But in the last year of this relationship, we decided to switch things up. We invited many of the folks we served down there to come up and spend a week with us here in Rochester. My job was to organize a canoe trip for the teenagers on the Zumbro River. I had 15-20 inner city teenagers on this trip, some of which probably had never touched a canoe in their life. I had to explain how you get in and out of a canoe without tipping it over and how you hold and use a paddle. Now the Zumbro, in August, is usually pretty serene and slow. There are spots where it gets deep and over your head.

But overall, it's pretty tame. I remember warning them: "If you find yourself drifting too far to one side and there's a tree hanging over the edge of the water, don't grab the tree branches. The tree is not moving. But the canoe is, and it's not going to stop so if you grab that tree branch, you will flip your canoe." I think we had made it through 2/3rds of the trip when, of course, someone grabbed a tree branch, and sure enough, they dumped themselves in the creek. What happened next was rather traumatic. Remember, these were inner city kids, maybe couldn't swim, and probably felt as though they were out in dangerous wild country. One of the kids who fell out of the canoe had a full-fledged panic attack. He started screaming, thrashing, swallowing the water, and lost all sense of direction until I went over, pulled him up with my hands, and shouted, "Stand up!" And he did, in all of about 3 feet of water. And once he got his feet on the solid river bottom, he was ok. A little embarrassed, but he was fine.

This crazy world we live in, especially the virtual world of social media, can seem like quite a force sometime. It has its own agenda and wants to carry us in that direction. To control us, it exaggerates every story and every crisis as if it cannot be opposed. It magnifies everything with more dramatic video until we believe we are facing something akin to a raging current. But more often than not, it's just made to look like a torrent on the surface. It's really not that deep or unstoppable. We simply must remember to put our feet down on the solid foundation that's always been there for us and not lose hope. We trust, in the promise, and person, of Jesus Christ.

And when others see us standing up, refusing to capitulate to fear, it's like a light in the darkness for those who have lost hope. In demonstrating our faith, courage, love, and discipline in the face of crisis, we validate our trust in the Lord and persuade others to look to Him as well.

Looking for examples of those who tried it? How about Francis of Assisi, Vincent de Paul, Mother Cabrini, Catherine Drexal, Mother Theresa, and a whole myriad of saints? What do you get when folks walk with faith? You get charities, orphanages, hospitals, and universities. You get our Catholic Church, who guides humanity in the right direction.

So how do we solidify our faith? You're already doing it. We come to Mass, listen to God's word, partake of the sacraments, and when we can, we delve even deeper. See, I told you there was nothing new.

Let us trust in Jesus Christ. May He encourage and enkindle the Spirit given to us at our baptism, so we can truly follow Him. And always remember, when things get rough, we put our feet down and stand on solid rock, our faith in Jesus Christ.