

27th SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – C (October 2, 2022)

My brother Tom is five years older than me. One of the things I remember from our growing-up years on the farm was hearing about how he asked Dad if he could have a horse, and that Dad said ‘yes, when you are 50.’ Now, Tom was born in 1950, so he didn’t turn 50 until the year 2000 by which time Dad was no longer with us (he died in 1988). But—kind and thoughtful soul that I am—I did give Tom a little plastic horse when he turned 50, so after some 40-45 years, he finally got his horse! I thought he would be a lot more excited about it than he was; maybe he had forgotten about it...

Why do I share this little episode of Kopacek family history with you? It came to mind when I was looking at the readings for today, especially the first one from the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk. He is pleading for help from God and is frustrated at God’s apparent silence or lack of concern. Habakkuk had reason for his desperate prayer—he lived about 600 years before the time of Christ, a time when the Chosen People had both fallen away from God in many ways and were in danger of being conquered by the nearby Babylonians (and in fact were later taken away in captivity for 70 years). God finally responds and tells the prophet: ‘the vision still has its time...if it delays, wait for it, it will surely come’. In other words: ‘hang in there, Habakkuk, be patient—I hear your prayer and will answer it at the right time.’ God then gives one of the central truths of our Judeo-Christian heritage: ‘the just one, *because of his faith*, shall live.’

Faith—that foundational gift and virtue upon which our knowledge of God and our relationship with God is built. Faith has two basic elements:

1. It is a gift from God by which we are able to know and to accept what he reveals to us about both himself and ourselves...
2. and faith is also our decision, aided by grace but made freely of our own will, to accept the truth of what God has revealed to us and to live out the gospel of Jesus his Son.

Faith therefore and necessarily involves our free decision to trust in God, to have confidence in his desire and his will to help and strengthen us in all things. It is based on our knowledge that God loves us with a passion and a power that we can’t even describe; because of that, we believe and trust that he does and will answer our prayers.

I’m well aware, of course, of the typical response: “‘God hears and answers our prayers’, huh? So why did he let my loved one die when I prayed months and months for his healing and recovery?” Or: “why has my child cut me out of her and her family’s life when I’ve been praying nonstop for reconciliation and restoring our family relationship?” Or... you can fill in your own ‘prayer of frustration’; we have all been there at one time or another, and probably more than once.

Again, we need to remember that faith is first and foremost a gift from God. As our Catechism puts it: “Before this faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist him; he must have the interior helps of the Holy Spirit who moves the heart and converts it to God” (n. 153). Because faith originates in God, we need to pray for that gift and that it be strengthened and deepened. In today’s gospel the apostles were not shy about that kind of prayer; St. Luke tells us that they pleaded with Jesus: “Increase our faith”. That’s not at all a

bad prayer for us to offer, especially when the going gets really tough for us like it did for Habakkuk.

But still we think “Lord, I’d really appreciate it if you would give me at least some little sign that know and care what I’m going through!” We do not sin in thinking this way, but we do need to ask ourselves: is God compelled to answer my prayers according to our demands and in our preferred time frame? Is our faith and our prayer life founded on our trust in the providence and love of God, or do we see God as some kind of divine ‘vending machine’—we put our prayers in the coin/prayer slot, we push the button, and then expect the instant fulfillment of our wants?

Parents, you do/did not always give your children (young or adult) everything they asked for and when they wanted it, and for a very good reason: you know full well that they sometimes ask for things that are not good for them, or that it’s not the right time. Dad didn’t give my brother a horse when he was just a little shaver; he knew full well that Tom couldn’t handle it at that time. If parents generally know better what’s best for their kids than the kids themselves know (and they do!), then how much more does our God of infinite love, wisdom and power know what we really need and when we need it better than we ourselves do—no matter if we are age 8, 18, or 80?

The older I get, the more I realize and am grateful for God’s great patience with me and with all of us. He continues to call and challenge us to ongoing conversion and to deeper faith, but he is also and always there to give us his help and to forgive our failures and sins. If God is so amazingly patient with us (and he is!), then can we not be more patient with him—he whose wisdom and love knows immeasurably more than we do about what is truly best for us now, in the future, and into eternity?

Remember again God’s response to Habakkuk’s prayer of frustration: “the vision still has its time,...and will not disappoint; if it delays, wait for it, it will surely come.” If we look back to other difficult or desperate times in our lives, we will realize that God’s grace was indeed there for us to help us survive and even grow through that toughness. Faith and our growth in faith is indeed a gift from God, but it’s a gift he wants to shower on us with great abundance and generosity. Let’s not be afraid or hesitant for a moment to ask for that gift in all needed ways; let’s allow him to fill us with his grace...and let’s be ever grateful to him for doing so.