

The Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Mulberry Tree (27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

Habakkuk 1:2-3; 2:2-4—How Long, O Lord?

1. Unanswered Prayer: “How long shall I cry for help?” (1:2)
2. Delay: “If it seem slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay” (1:3)

Psalms 95—If Today You Hear His Voice, Harden Not Your Hearts

1. Rock: the “Rock of our salvation” (cf. below; water in the desert) (v. 1)
2. Thanksgiving: “let us come into his presence with thanksgiving” (v. 2)
3. Meribah/Massah: God brings water from the Rock (Exod 17:1-7) (v. 6-9)

And he called the name of the place *Massah* (Hebrew “proof” or “test”) and *Meribah* (Hebrew “contention”), *because of the faultfinding* of the children of Israel, and because *they put the Lord to the proof* by saying, “*Is the Lord among us or not?*” (Exod 17:7)

2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14—Do Not Be Ashamed of Your Testimony to the Lord

1. Spirit of “Timidity” vs. Spirit of “Power” (1:7)

Luke 17:5-10—Faith the Size of a Mustard Seed

1. Context: Apostles plead: “Increase our faith (Greek *pistis*; Hebrew *’emunah*)!” (17:5)
2. Jesus’ Reply: The Mustard Seed and the Sycamine Tree
 - a. Mustard Seed: seed of “mustard” (Greek *synapi*); proverbially “smallest” seed
 - b. Sycamine Tree: “mulberry” or “sycamore” (Greek *sykaminos*) (cf. Luke 19:4)
 - c. Be Uprooted: extensive root system

“A tree may not be grown within twenty-five cubits of a cistern, or within fifty cubits if it is a carob or a sycamore-tree... (Mishnah, *Baba Bathra* 2:11; trans. H. Danby)

- d. Planted in the Sea: i.e., to do something completely *impossible* (supernatural)
3. Parable of the Servants’ Duty:
 - a. Question: are “servants” “thanked” (Greek *charis*) for doing what was “commanded” (Greek *diatassō*)?
 - b. Analogy: simply doing your “duty”/“obligation”/“debt” (Greek *opheilō*)
 - c. Humility: “unworthy servants”/“worthless slaves” (Greek *achreioi douloi*)

The Catechism on Unanswered Prayer

Evagrius Ponticus: Do not be troubled if you do not immediately receive from God what you ask him; for he desires to do something even greater for you, while you cling to him in prayer. (Evagrius Ponticus, *On Prayer* 34; cited in CCC 2737)

Augustine: God wills that our desire should be exercised in prayer, that we may be able to

receive what he is prepared to give. (Augustine, *Letters* 130.8, 17; cited in CCC 2737)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

1. What is God’s message to the waiting people of Israel in Habakkuk?

2. Why is Psalm 95 the responsorial Psalm for today? Why is it prayed every day in the Liturgy of the Hours? What happened at “Meribah” and “Massah”? (Hint: cf. Exod 17:1-7)

3. Why does Jesus use the imagery of a “mustard seed” and a “mulberry tree” to exemplify the power of supernatural faith?

For Further Study

1. Arthur A. Just, Jr. *Luke*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament III. Downers Grove: IVP, 2003. Pp. 265-67
3. Pablo Gadenz. *The Gospel of Luke*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018. Pp. 291-92.