

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time year C

Luke 17:5-10

The Apostles make a bold, noble, simple request.

“Increase our faith.”

Great idea!

The *response* to the request, however, is unusual, is not so simple.

Jesus *could have been* much simpler about things:

“Sure: hold still. Poof! *Voila*: more faith.”

Why did Jesus not simply lay hands on them, and then move on with his ministry?

Instead, Jesus does not seem to grant them their request. ...Or does he?

He *speaks* to them of faith.

And it is initially difficult to ascertain whether he is saying

- “If only you had faith the size of a mustard seed...”
- “You already have enough faith to uproot a mulberry tree...”

Regarding this first part of our passage (vv. 5-6), at least three questions arise:

1. What is the “power” of faith of which Jesus speaks?
2. Why the unusual example of uprooting a tree to make the point?
3. Is faith really about power?

1. Jesus is talking about powerful acts because of a seed, of a little bit, of faith.

So, does this mean that when I can walk into church, and see someone in “my” spot,

I can uproot the person, and place him or her elsewhere, or even out the window?

It seems no less random than uprooting a mulberry tree!

2. Why would Jesus, so to speak of the “power” of faith,
use a metaphor that is ecologically destructive?

Leave the poor mulberry tree alone.

If there is anyone who knows the splendor and value of nature, it is Jesus.

If Jesus is the God-man, God who binds humanity,

and, by humanity, the whole Cosmos to himself, then *in Him*, nature is holy.

Jesus is *the* ecologist. What, then, is the deal?

3. Is faith first about *power*?

Faith is a gift that takes root in the mind, and enables the mind
to receive God, First Truth, Light, sharing Himself.

Faith is first about *light*.

What, then, is Jesus saying?

This luminous God whom we receive thanks to faith is also *omnipotent*.

God, to whom we are bound by/in faith, is greater than the Cosmos.

By (living) faith, we participate in the power of God.

The disciples probably had some sense of this

– enough so that they wanted an *increase in power* with an increase in faith.

Jesus thus makes a point about participation in his power by faith
so to highlight their preoccupation, a preoccupation which he then corrects.
Such is the seemingly disconnected second part of this passage (vv. 7-10),
in which Jesus speaks of servanthood.

What follows is a *correction* from Jesus.

Jesus wants to set the record straight.

We participate in more than the power of God.

A disciple, a friend of God, of Jesus,

is not some sort of independent spiritual cowboy or cowgirl.

There are no Christian terminators.

Faith turns us towards a loving God,

- upon we willfully depend
- to whom, in the end, we owe *everything*

To be bound to Jesus in faith means/entails doing as He does,

- following Him to the Cross
- laying down our lives in gratitude to Him and in love for one another

We participate in the endless *love* of God.

And if we owe Him everything,

then whatever we do in response to such unfathomable love is the *least* we can do.

“We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.”

In loving response to Jesus

- listening patiently to someone really boring
- praying for a few hours
- lowering the middle finger and instead waving at the crazy commuter next to us
- spending oneself for underprivileged children
- probing difficult Scripture passages
- smiling at the cashier whose incompetence is making us late
- joining a parish ministry
- receiving the sacrament of Reconciliation
is the *least* we can do
is just the *beginning* of our response

“We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.”

Jesus is not dismissing the disciples, and telling them that they are of no value.

He is revealing the absoluteness of the gift of Himself to them (to us!),

in the light of which we are just “unprofitable” (sometimes translated “useless” servants).

In other words,

- we serve the One who, strictly speaking has no need of us,
but Who *wants* to associate us to the wonder of loving humanity
- we serve the One Who takes the initiatives and Who brings to completion

In our being joined to Christ, and thus in becoming friends who are servants,

we discover that power is always at the service of love.

Look to the Cross to see the most splendid, most baffling display of divine power,
of divine power at the service of divine love.

And forget not that we serve in response to Christ who first loves and serves us:

- “The master will gird himself, have them recline at table, and proceed to wait on them.” Luke 12:37
- “Who is greater: the one seated at table or the who serves?
Is it not the one seated at table?
Yet I am among you as the one who serves.” Luke 22:27

Whenever it is difficult to pour forth our hearts,

- we are perhaps not letting Christ love and serve us
- we have probably resumed doing it on our own, just trying to be “good people”

Let us let God love and serve us, and in that transfigure our hearts, that we can then

- joyously spend ourselves
- serve God in one another
- bring healing to each and all

Bound to God in living faith, we *are* powerful,

that is to say, *nothing* can stop us from loving and from being loved.