

Trinity 16 2019

The Gospel reading (Luke 17: 5-10) is a short one.

In this reading, we are told that our relationship with God makes obedience to God a duty to be fulfilled and not an occasion for reward.

The apostles in this reading have asked for an increase in faith. But, I imagine, once again like on so not many other occasions, they are missing the mark. They want an increase in faith rather than a deepening of faith. It's one of those moments when the people involved think that quantity matters more than quality and Jesus replies by giving a good illustration of how they might consider the concept that in many cases less may mean more and more may mean less.

A mustard seed is small, but look at what grows from it.

Even if our germ of faith is small, if it is genuine, there can be real growth beyond what we can see ourselves.

We do not need more faith. We need faith that is alive and growing and a small measure of faith that relates to God is more important than a faith that we use to seek attraction to ourselves.

Do we expect our faith to sow seeds for the faith and deeds of others that bears fruit for which we gain no praise or glory?

Are you prepared for a life of service?

There are two Greek words for service in this short passage: διακονέω (*diakonéo*), relates particularly to supplying food and drink. It means to be a servant, attendant, domestic, to serve, wait upon. It is the same term that gives us the word “deacon” in the ministry of the Church.

The story is told about a young curate in his first year of ordained ministry, and who was attending a parish function for pensioners. When he was asked by the rector's wife to go around the tables and top up the cups of tea, he protested, insinuating that this was not what he had been ordained for.

“Oh,” said the rector’s wife. “Did you not know it’s a deacon’s job to serve at tables.”

In the New Testament, the service of this type of servant is different to the role of a steward or a slave. It means to minister to someone, to render service to them, to serve or minister to them; to wait at a table and to offer food and drink to the guests. It often had a special reference to women and the preparation of food. It relates to supplying food and the necessities of life.

The second word, δοῦλος (*doulos*), in verses 7, 9 and 10, refers to a slave, someone who is in a servile condition. But it also refers metaphorically to someone who gives himself or herself up to the will of another, those whose service is used by Christ in extending and advancing his cause.

When you become a priest, you still remain a deacon. Indeed, when a priest becomes a bishop, they still remain a deacon in the Church of God, a slave and a servant of God and of his Kingdom.

Humility is a difficult thing. If we think we have it then we probably have not. False humility, whether in fictional characters like Uriah Heep in Charles Dickens’ *David Copperfield*, or in ourselves is a particularly unattractive quality. True humility is grounded upon an honest and contented self -knowledge. It is liberating freeing us to serve and to lead.

Today’s Gospel Luke has strung together the sayings of Jesus like beads in a necklace. The thread holding them together is the humility that shapes the life of Jesus’ closest followers but they show their humility lapses from time to time when some ask to sit at his right and left in the Kingdom.

Humble disciples live with a life that can transform the world.

As John Kiddle, currently Archdeacon of Wandsworth in the neighbouring Diocese of Southwark has written;

*“When the disciples ask for greater faith, Jesus replies in with a picturesque challenge to contemplate the impossible- the mulberry tree being especially resistant to uprooting- and to believe that God can do it. The power of faith, like the smallest of seeds, does not stem from its greatness but from its ability to point us away from ourselves to God.*

*A life shaped by humility is a life that finds joy and freedom in service. In a typically provocative way, Jesus describes his disciples as slaves; they freely choose to serve and in doing so find liberation and life.”*

So, how might we find liberation in our hectic, sometimes frenetic world? The answer is simple- by living a life of faith and service. It is as simple as that- it's doing it that is the difficult bit!

Think about it!

Pray about it!

Amen.