

OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA WEYMOUTH

HOMILY FOR TWENTYSEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C)

3rd OCTOBER 2010

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."

It sounds as if they needed encouragement.

Some people in our community need encouragement too.

The visit of Pope Benedict to our country has given a great boost to our faith but, as Fr. Stephen reminded us last week, problems remain. One of the greatest problems is to lose faith in prayer, to think that "God does not answer my prayers."

In the first reading we find the prophet Habakkuk making the same complaint: "How long, Lord, am I to cry for help while you will not listen?"

He is getting impatient with God. He assumes that God is not listening to his prayers.

However, God does speak to him and tells him to be patient. God is acting but some things take time.

Seeds, like the mustard seed in the gospel, must have time to grow. It's the same with the working out of God's will for us.

God is eager to fulfil his plan for us but it may take time.

Another reason for loss of faith in prayer is that we have unrealistic expectations of God. We often expect God to give us what we think is best but we may be wrong. This is the point of the little parable in the gospel.

Servants do not have their meals first and they do not get thanked for doing their duty to their master. The servants were not doing him a favour. They were keeping their side of the bargain.

If servants expected to eat first or to be thanked we would say that they had false expectations and should not be surprised if they are disappointed.

It's the same with us and God. Everything good thing we have is a gift from God.

"All goods gifts around us are sent from heaven above."

If we have false expectations of God we should not complain if we are disappointed.

A third reason for losing faith in prayer may be that God expects us, his people, to take the action that will answer prayer for ourselves and for other people. This may well be the case with the harvest for which we are thanking God today.

Let's imagine being without food and praying to God for enough food to survive on.

Nothing happens.

We could blame God but we know that God wants to give us life.

So we think again and we discover that in other parts of the world people have too much food.

So we change our prayer and ask God to inspire the people with too much food to send their surplus to us who are starving.

We do not expect God to change the soil or the climate but we do expect God to change the attitude of the people who have too much food.

We know, however, that God has given every person free will so we cannot pray God to force anyone to share their food with us.

Our only realistic prayer can be that the people who can help us will hear the cry of the Holy Spirit on our behalf and be inspired to send us what we need.

So when we think that God is not listening to our prayer we have to remember that God may be waiting for the co-operation of other people and that this may take time.

So when we find ourselves thinking ,like Habakkuk, that God is not listening to our prayer, let's check that we are giving God time, that we are praying realistically and that we are doing all that we can do ourselves.

Then we can pray with the apostles, "Lord, increase our faith" and hear him say, as he said to Habakkuk, "I want to answer your prayer, but if my answer comes slowly, wait, for come it will, without fail."

Rev Geoff Carey