

HOMILY

The Twenty-seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time

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Did you hear about the young man who needed to buy a car? He wanted to know that whatever car he bought was in God's will for him. One night he had a dream in which everything he saw was yellow. The next day he went to a car dealership and bought the "**YELLOWEST**" car he could find. True to form, the car was a real lemon.

This well-meaning young man looking for a sign reminds me of Jesus' Disciples asking him for more faith in our lesson for today. Already the Master had given them the power and the authority to heal and to cast out demons. You would think this would be enough. They were with Jesus daily. They saw miracles that would make our hearts stand still. And they wanted more faith? What more could Jesus possibly give them?

Interestingly, he doesn't give them anything more. He simply replies, "*If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea' and it would obey you.*"

I believe he is saying to them and to us, "Your problem really isn't a lack of faith." It doesn't take much faith to do sensational things. What it takes is commitment. What it takes is determination and persistence and a will to see it through to the end. A little faith and a lot of hard work. The problem is not that we have too little faith. The problem is that we are not applying the faith we do have. Sounds pretty easy, right?

Jesus then goes on to tell them a strange little parable. He says, "*Suppose one of you has a servant who's been plowing or looking after sheep. When that servant comes in from work, would you say to the servant, 'Come here immediately and take your place at table?' Not likely! You would probably say, 'Prepare something for me to eat. Wait on me while I eat and drink.' Then, after dinner, would you thank the servant because he did what he was told to do?*"

Then Jesus adds these interesting words, *“So should it be with you. When you have done all you have been commanded say, ‘We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we have been obliged to do.’”*

Here is a teaching that is so out of step with our times that it takes some explanation. Jesus lived in a world in which slavery was a fact of life. In such a world, after the master of the house had eaten the meal, no way would he have gone out of his way to thank the servant; nor would the servant expect to be thanked. After all, he had simply done his duty.

You and I wouldn’t fare well in such a culture. We like to be appreciated for our work. We like to be patted on the back, rewarded. We would not like being a faceless servant.

In preparing for a role in a movie as a butler, actor Anthony Hopkins once spent some time with a professional butler. This butler measured his success by how well he could be of service while not drawing any attention to himself. “The real test of a butler’s excellence,” he said, “is that the room seems emptier when he’s in it.”

This is a concept that is alien to us. We don’t want to disappear into the woodwork. We like people to recognize us when we’ve done a good job; to say “well done,” or even, on occasion, to give us extravagant praise. In fact, there was an article in [The Flint Journal](#) a month ago about the challenge many companies have today giving their younger workers constant positive reinforcement. Because of the high self-esteem movement, that is what many of today’s young adults have gotten at home and in school from the day they were born. “You’re the greatest!” “There’s never been anyone like you before!” It’s getting hard for people in our society to imagine doing anything simply and solely because it’s our duty.

To set Jesus’ words in a more contemporary setting, we might imagine paying our light bill. When you send that small fortune off to pay for your utilities, you don’t expect a letter back from the president of the power company saying, “Well done! You paid on time! Super job! Keep up the good work! We’re proud of you!” No, we pay our bill because that is our responsibility—particularly if we don’t want our lights turned off.

Or when we pay our taxes, we don't expect a letter from the IRS saying, "You are one super citizen. I wish we had ten million more like you." No; we pay our taxes because that is our duty as citizens.

So, also, Jesus says when you and I serve God, we are only doing our duty. We don't deserve any special reward. Neither do we need any special gifts to carry out our work. We don't even need an abundance of faith. What we need is to show up, willing to do our part.

The office recently received a phone call from a teenager. She called to say that she wanted to do something to help people. But, she said, she could only help on Saturday after 2 o'clock and before 5 because she had sports and studies and a busy social schedule. And she really didn't want to do anything outside because of the bugs. But her mother said to be sure it was with people because that looks best on a college resume. And she liked the idea of working with the hungry; but she really didn't want to cook anything, and she definitely did not want to do the dishes. But helping people was something she really wanted to do.

The truth of the matter is that is how too many people want to serve today—when it is convenient for them. When it is in their comfort zone. When they can receive recognition and appreciation. The disciples went to Jesus asking for more faith. He said "Guys and gals, you don't need more faith. You need to unwrap it and commit yourselves to it." This is our problem, too, isn't it?

So on this day when we hear that story "Give It to Us," let's not ask in the receiving mode but let's go in the giving mode. And let's call to mind that we have been given great faith...faith that can move mountains...that can uproot a tree and put it into the sea. All we need to do with God's help, with the Servant-Master in Jesus, is to go forth this day and say "Here I Am!"