

Homily on Luke 17:1-6

November 13, 2017

Intro: The University is a place of reason. Its curriculum is leavened by the Theology department's introduction of faith into the reasoning process. Its dimension of affective and social growth in grace is leavened by Campus Ministry, and especially by its celebration of Mass.

The Readings for today encompass both dimensions of our university life. The book of Wisdom is as close as the Old Testament gets to the discipline of philosophy. The Lord's spirit of wisdom fills the world--- the inanimate world of bosons, bugs, and beasts as well as the soul of each person. It rejects injustice wherever it is found. Yet this reasoned justice is found in its wholeness in those who entrust themselves to God in faith: "He shows himself to those who do not disbelieve Him."

But it is Jesus who emphasizes the role of faith in all that his disciples think and do. In today's reading from Luke Jesus asks of his community a willingness to correct the sinner in its midst, and to forgive the sinner who repents, as many as seven times in the same day. His disciples understand that this is beyond the reasonable, and they ask for the gift of faith that will make such continual forgiveness possible.

To this the Lord replies with a saying that many take as indecipherable koan: "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and transplanted in the sea,' and it would obey you." Imagine this impossibility: where would be the roots?

The Meaning for us is difficult to understand because we do not know the nature of faith. Our Catholic theology has defined faith as based on the credibility of the evidence. And that is true: it separates our faith from the craziness of some of the evangelicals for whom reason is only a trick of the devil.

But in itself faith is trust in the unlimited power of God. Ours is a Creator God who knows quarks and mesons, and who knows the limits of the universe which no human will ever know. Ours is a God who has the power to become man while still remaining God. Ours is a God who feeds His people on the one Body and Blood of the Risen Christ in millions of mouths each day. These are mysteries far greater than the transplanting of a mulberry bush in the sea!

But of course the crucial element in all of this is that **you** must believe in this all powerful God. You have to believe that you can forgive seven times in a day. You have to believe like St. Paul that you can carry the gospel to the ends of the earth. You have to believe like Teresa of Avila that you can reform a whole community of monks and nuns. You have to believe like today's saint, Frances Xavier Cabrini, that you can found a hospital and an orphanage in a pagan environment like Seattle. And in all of this you have to believe that it is God who does it, if only you have faith the size of a mustard seed.

The trick is not to look at your feeble self, but to look at the all-powerful and all-loving God who invites you to believe in what He can do in you.

Begin by receiving the Lord Jesus in faith in your mouth and let him fill your heart. It's all about God, not about you. That's the good news.