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Text: Luke 17:5-10

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Pentecost 19

INCREASE OUR FAITH!

Have you ever wanted to have a stronger faith? Have you ever struggled with doubts? Have you ever wondered if there is a God, and if there is a God, why God seems so far away?

If so, you are not alone. I dare say we all go through times when faith eludes us, times when doubt overwhelms us, times when there seems to be no light in the tunnel at all. I have.

Christopher Hitchens caused a stir recently when he wrote about the crises of faith which plagued Mother Teresa for years. Mother Teresa labored tirelessly among the poorest of poor in the streets of Calcutta. She devoted her life to caring for people abandoned by everyone else. People all over the world looked up to her. She was awarded international prizes. World leaders visited her. Many today see her as a saint. She was, and is, lifted up as an example for all to follow.

And yet doubts tormented her. She was terrified by the thoughts that flooded her mind. She feared for her soul. "So many unanswered questions live within me," she said. "I'm afraid to uncover them - because of the blasphemy - if there be God - please forgive me - when I try to raise my thoughts to heaven - there is such convicting emptiness that those very thoughts return like sharp knives and hurt my very soul. - I am told God loves me - and yet the reality of darkness and coldness and emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul."

Even those closest to Jesus yearn for a deeper, stronger faith. In today's Gospel reading the disciples cried out to Jesus, "Increase our faith." And in so doing, they give voice to the cries of people everywhere, and perhaps they express what you are yearning for right now.

So, how does it happen? How does one get a stronger faith? Jesus said two

things that can help us. First, he said, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”

When we read these words in Greek, it becomes clearer what Jesus said. In Greek, the words “if you had faith” express a condition according to fact. In other words, faith was already present. Jesus was saying, “If you have faith - and you do!” Or to put it another way, Jesus was saying, “since you have faith.” Jesus did not reprimand the disciples for not having any faith, nor did he scold them for having weak faith. He affirmed the faith they had and invited them to put their faith to work.

The same is true for you. When you cry out, “Lord, increase my faith, “ the Lord responds the same way. He doesn’t scold you for not having much faith. He affirms the faith you have and assures you that even the tiniest faith is powerful and can do amazing things!

After all, your faith is a gift from God. The very fact that you yearn for a stronger faith is evidence that you have faith. God has given you this faith. If you wonder about your faith, don’t look inside yourself, look to God. If you look inside, you will always be disappointed at the size of your faith. Look instead to God. Look to the cross and remember that Jesus died on the cross to take away your sins. Look to the empty tomb and remember that Jesus rose from the dead to give you life with God. Look to the Day of Pentecost and remember that Jesus has given you his Spirit. Remember that Jesus has done everything necessary for you to be saved - and that includes giving you faith. God would not do all of that for you and then sit back and wait to see how much faith you can muster. No, God’s love for you is so great that God even helps you to believe.

When you worry about the lack of faith, remember what God has given you, and even though you may not be feeling anything inside, faith is present. And no matter what the size of your faith, it is powerful and can do amazing things!

The second thing Jesus says is, “do what you are supposed to do.” He used

the example of a slave who does what the master wants. That's what we are to do, he says. Keep on doing your ministry. Keep on raising your kids. Keep on doing your best at work. Keep on studying hard at school. Keep on being a friend to your neighbor. Keep on raising money for the hungry. Keep on serving as an usher. Keep doing your ministry.

Jesus knows that faith grows through action. Like a muscle in the body, faith grows through exercise. You may think your faith is very small, you may even wonder if you have faith at all, yet as you engage in ministry, the faith that God has given you grows.

So, if you are going through a hard time, struggling with doubt, wondering if you have much faith at all, be assured that God has not abandoned you. God will never turn his back on you. God hears your prayer and will help you have a stronger faith. Be patient, in due time, your faith will grow. Meanwhile, keep remembering what the Lord has given you and keep doing your ministry.

In this Word of God we see that the way to a stronger faith is this: remember what God has given you and keep doing your ministry.