

27th Sunday, yr. C, Xavier Church, Hab. 1, 2-3. 2, 2-4; Ps. 95; 2 Tim. 1, 6-8. 13-14; Lk. 17, 5-10.

Fr. Ward Biemans SJ

Dear brothers and sisters, in the first reading we heard about a vision of the prophet Habakuk, which will come in its time and not too late. The vision is about the final victory of the righteous. Still, it was not so positive: it had to be preceded by a battle against the enemy, also because the people themselves had not lived in a very uplifting way with the peoples surrounding them. There had been divisions and a corrupt jurisdiction among themselves, too.

Such a vision can appear gloomy because it foretells a difficult time, yet at the same time it can be very valuable. Another example is the visions of Blessed Catherine of Emmerich, who lived in a convent not far across the border in Germany in the 19th century; visions that allowed her to identify very strongly with the suffering of Christ. For this very reason, she was an example and a source of comfort and hope for many people who visited her in the convent. It stood out that the Eucharist was especially vital to her.

This is not to say that everyone understood her. Even for her fellow sisters, it was difficult to fully respect her way with God. But Catherine continued to bear witness in her life to Christ, her divine Bridegroom. Even when at one point their convent was closed by order of the government.

Similarly, it can happen to us when we face setbacks, through illness or because people dear to us fall away. Or that we worry about the places in the world where there is war, or about the economic situation, or the position of refugees in our society. It can make us ask, like the apostles, 'Increase our faith'. Jesus makes it clear to us that even faith as small as a mustard seed can work miracles.

He especially points out that, in our steadfastness of faith, we should remain humble at the same time. 'We have only done our duty.' That is the answer Jesus gives us when we have done everything we were asked to do. When it comes to good deeds, we don't need to toot our own horn.

Even in the rare case when certain religious experiences happen to us, a certain sobriety is appropriate. St Teresa of Avila, who, like Catherine of

Emmerich, had many mystical experiences, was known for this. We celebrate her memory on the 15th of October.

It can happen to us, she wrote, that once we have discovered the Lord's mildness, a mixture with self-love can arise in us. It is well when the soul is at peace during prayer. But the Lord does not give us peace in our conscience when we find that we can help another person to be better able to walk his or her path with God. So our prayer life will always have to be interspersed with the action of helping others to the extent of our ability. And that is no cause for sorrow. Teresa reminds us that when we have to do our work in the kitchen, for example, we may know that God can also be found between the pots and pans. God is present in our midst and helps us in the inner as well as the outer world around us.

A saint like Teresa can keep us from being too rigid in faith, because God goes with us in ways beyond our imagination. In prayer, we open ourselves to Him so that He can truly be God in our lives. Then we will find that He works in unexpected ways in our lives, that He makes us grow in love for Him and for our neighbour. And above all, through prayer we find that we can overcome our own limitations by his grace. Amen.