

## 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

### Habakkuk 1:2-3, 2:2-4

*Nothing is known of the life or person of this minor prophet and although the meaning of his name is uncertain, it has been suggested that it be “one who wrestles with God.” While we are not certain about the circumstances that surround this prophecy,<sup>1</sup> the book was probably written between 605-597 B.C., just before the Babylonians invaded Judah and captured Jerusalem. The situation of Judah was desperate at this time with political intrigue and idolatry widespread in the small kingdom.<sup>11</sup> Verses 2 and 3 are the prayer of Habakkuk complaining to God for allowing the people to suffer so long with no sign of God’s intervention.<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that among the scrolls found in the first cave at Qumran was a commentary on Habakkuk although it covers only the first two chapters.<sup>2</sup>*

**2How long, O Lord? I cry for help but you do not listen! I cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not intervene.** Habakkuk finds the Lord’s toleration of the wicked very difficult to understand. God’s inactivity is intolerable.<sup>1</sup>

**3Why do you let me see ruin; why must I look at misery? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and clamorous discord.** Here the Prophet, speaking for the community dares to call God to account for His way of governing the world, for His permission of evil. The prophet gives vent to his dismay that a just God could allow such trouble. This is not a cry of despair but of dismay and urgency and the prophet knows that apart from God there is no help at all.<sup>2</sup> The vigor of Habakkuk’s words probably lies in the fact that he is not just bemoaning the people’s lot; he is actually praying—and prayer should never be contrived, it should come straight from the heart. As St. Therese explained: “I say to God simply what I want to say to Him, without using sweet words or beautiful phrases, and He always hears and understands me. For me, in times of suffering and times of joy, prayer is an impulse of the heart, a glance up to heaven, an expression of gratitude and love.”<sup>13</sup>

**2:2Then the Lord answered me and said: Write down the vision clearly upon the tablets,** Since most prophecy was communicated orally, a special command to write it down accentuates its importance and means that it is not for Habakkuk’s ears alone.<sup>2</sup> so that one can read it readily. The tablets are probably of wood or stone and the message is to be written like a sign in large letters and posted at some conspicuous spot in the temple. The fulfillment of the vision is not to take place immediately, but the inscription will be there to sustain those who await its promise.<sup>2</sup>

**3For the vision** (of God’s intervention) **still has its time,** It will take place at the moment determined by God.<sup>1</sup> **presses on to fulfillment, and will not disappoint; if it delays, wait for it, it will surely come, it will not be late.** Saint Augustine says: “Since God is the highest good, he would not allow any evil to exist in his works unless his omnipotence and goodness were such as to bring good even out of evil.”<sup>10</sup>

**4The rash one has no integrity;** The wicked (in this case, Babylon) has within himself the seeds of his own destruction and time will inevitably reap its toll.<sup>2</sup> **but the just one,** The just man is he who is right in his relations with God and his fellow man.<sup>2</sup> **because of his faith,** Faith as it is used here means faithfulness, loyalty and steadfastness.<sup>1</sup> **shall live.** Fidelity to Yahweh will, despite all appearances to the contrary, bring the fullness of life.<sup>2</sup> This is the key verse of the entire book. And this theme is taken up in the NT and applied in significant contexts: Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; and Hebrews 10:38-39.<sup>2</sup>

## 2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14

*This letter was written by Paul, who was in prison, to Timothy, who was working in Ephesus. In this letter, Paul is without hope of being released; he expects to be condemned and to suffer martyrdom in the near future.<sup>1</sup> This last letter that Paul wrote is usually considered his spiritual testament.<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to note that Christianity has always flourished under persecution. “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church” wrote Tertullian in the third century. The strongest churches today are still found in countries where it costs something to be a Christian.<sup>10</sup>*

### Beloved:

**6** I remind you, to stir into flame the gift of God that you have, Paul is reminding Timothy (and all of us) that God has given him a gift. The extent of man’s active cooperation will determine whether the grace received will enjoy a reawakening or suffer a decline. Negligence and forgetfulness tend to extinguish it. A positive, active, and vivid response reanimate it as a breadth of our mouth revives a flame. No fire of God becomes a blaze, spiritually speaking, without man’s collaboration.<sup>4</sup>

**through the imposition of my hands.** This refers to his ordination by Paul.<sup>1</sup>

**7** For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, It seems that Timothy was inclined to be timid.<sup>1</sup> **but rather of power and love and self-control.** This is a good description of the authentic Christian and there is no better collection of qualities than power (strength), love, and self-control to ensure effective leadership in the church.<sup>7</sup> The Council of Trent uses verses 6 and 7 when it solemnly defines Holy Orders as a sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup>

**8** So do not be ashamed of your testimony, In Paul’s mind this is to include preaching and suffering.<sup>1</sup> **to out Lord,** Lay people also fulfill their prophetic mission by evangelization, that is, the proclamation of Christ by word and the testimony of life. This evangelization acquires a specific property and peculiar effectiveness because it is accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world. The true apostle is on the lookout for occasions of announcing Christ by word, either to unbelievers or to the faithful.<sup>3</sup> (CCC 905) **nor of me, a prisoner for his sake; but bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God.**

**13** Take as your norm the sound words that you heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Paul is telling him to TRANSMIT FAITHFULLY the words that he got from Paul and (in verse 14) to GUARD these words CAREFULLY.<sup>4</sup> The first generation of Christians did not yet have a written New Testament.<sup>3</sup> (CCC 83) The Word of God which was entrusted to the apostles was transmitted to their successors so that, enlightened, by the Spirit of truth, they could faithfully preserve, expound, and spread it abroad by their preaching.<sup>3</sup> (CCC 81)

**14** Guard this rich trust with the help of the Holy Spirit that dwells within us. The Holy Spirit has been with the Church since the day of Pentecost guaranteeing the faithful transmission of the entire body of teaching revealed by God, ensuring that it be unchanged in any way. The Holy Spirit also bestows a variety of gifts: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of the Lord <sup>3</sup>(1831) as well as many other charisms) upon the Church and adorns her with their subsequent fruits (Charity, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Generosity, Gentleness, Faithfulness, Modesty, Self-control, and Chastity<sup>3</sup> (CCC 1832).<sup>6</sup>

## Luke 17:5-10

This is part of the discourse that Jesus gave to his disciples in December of the year before he died. Though spoken primarily to them and for them, this parable applies also to every member of the Church.<sup>12</sup>

5The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith,' Faith is a gift from God that moves the heart and converts it to God. It also opens the eyes of the mind and makes it easy to accept and believe the truth.<sup>3</sup> (CCC 153) This request of the apostles had to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. The initiative is always from Him.<sup>4</sup> But man has the power to REFUSE to accept God's revelation and to REFUSE to listen to the truth which He offers us. St Paul tells us that "By rejecting the guidance of conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith." (1 Tim 1:19)

6The Lord replied, 'If you have faith the size of a mustard seed,' This is a very small seed. "you would say to this mulberry tree,' This was a large tree with extensive roots. 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' Even that which seems completely impossible becomes possible if it is approached with faith.<sup>8</sup> 'and it would obey you.' Jesus seems to be saying, "Don't worry about how much faith you have. It is such a powerful thing that even a tiny bit of it makes you potential miracle workers. You have plenty of faith. Now nourish it and make it grow."<sup>7</sup> To live, grow, and persevere in the faith until the end we must nourish it with the word of God; we must beg the Lord to increase our faith; it must be working through charity, abounding in hope, and rooted in the faith of the Church.<sup>3</sup> (CCC 162)

7'Who among you would say to your servant who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field,' Working in the fields does not merit a special reward—it is simply what is expected.<sup>5</sup> We can never put God in our debt. When we have done our best we have only done our duty.<sup>8</sup> God has already blessed the believers with gifts beyond measure. Their service is a response to God's grace, not a way of earning that grace.<sup>5</sup> 'Come here immediately and take your place at table?'

8'Would he not rather say to him, "Prepare something for me to eat. Put on your apron and wait on me while I eat and drink.'" They were to put their Master's will first and foremost in their lives. This was the attitude of mind and heart which they were to entertain about themselves and their work for their Lord, and the purpose of such an attitude was to keep them ever humble.<sup>12</sup> "'You may eat and drink when I am finished?'" This tells them that there will be a reward in due time.<sup>12</sup>

9'Is he grateful to that servant because he did what was commanded?' Here Jesus is using an example that was very familiar to his audience to show the attitude a person should have towards his Creator: everything, from our very existence to the eternal happiness promised us, is one huge gift from God: man is always in debt to God; no matter what service man renders Him he can never adequately repay the gifts God has given him. This was put into practice by our Lady who replied to God's messenger: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord."<sup>9</sup>

10'So should it be with you. When you have done all you have been commanded,' The service which the Christian must perform is praising God and serving man.<sup>4</sup> 'say, "We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.'" So, too, those who work in the field spreading the word of God should not expect special rewards. They are only doing their duty.<sup>5</sup>

*Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (2) "Old Testament Reading Guide: ZEPHANIAH, NAHUM, HABAKKUK, LAMENTATIONS, OBADIAH," by George T. Montague, S.M., (3) "The Catechism of the Catholic Church," (4) "Saint Joseph Commentary On The Sunday Readings: Year C" by Achille Degeest, O.F.M., (5) "workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1998" by Lawrence E. Mick, (6) "The Navarre Bible: Thessalonians And Pastoral Epistles," (7) "workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2004" by Aelred R. Rosser, (8) "The Gospel of Luke" by William Barclay, (9) "The Navarre Bible: St. Luke," (10) "You Can Understand The Bible" by Peter Kreeft, (11) "Saint Joseph Edition, The New American Bible," (12) "THE PARABLES OF CHRIST" BY Charles J. Callan, O.P. and (13) "The Navarre Bible: Minor Prophets."*

*In loving memory of Peg Scheller, who compiled these commentaries.*