

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR C

Second Reading 2 Timothy 1: 6–8, 13–14

The letters to Timothy and to Titus are called ‘pastoral letters’. They are the only ones addressed to an individual in charge of a local church, though they are clearly meant for the whole community.

As mentioned in previous Prego Plus notes on the letters to Timothy, this letter was probably not written by Paul himself. However, uncertainty about the authorship should not ‘obscure the power of this letter read simply as it is presented. It is an eloquently passionate appeal of the greatest Christian apostle that his work continue beyond his death through generations of disciples’. (Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (1997).)

Timothy was one of Paul’s most trusted companions: he was often sent on delicate missions. He was the son of a Greek father and a Jewish Christian mother, a native of Lystra in central Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). Paul took him as an associate when he passed through Lystra on his second missionary journey.

Paul’s laying on of hands indicates not so much an ordination as a stamp of approval, making it clear that he endorses Timothy’s mission.

The exhortation not to be ashamed, nor to succumb to timidity, may allude to Timothy having had second thoughts about his mission. Two pieces of advice are given: trust and use Paul’s teaching; and rely on the Holy Spirit to sustain your commitment. All is bearable with God’s help.



Gospel: Luke 17: 5–10

Over the past six weeks, we have accompanied Jesus as he journeys towards Jerusalem and his Passion. Our attention has focused on the opposition to Jesus and his disciples. Luke now returns to the subject of renewal and the demands of discipleship.

‘Increase our faith!’

Jesus has just reminded his friends that they are to show the kind of love and forgiveness which most people find very difficult, so they ask for an increase in faith.

Faith the size of a mustard seed

Jesus replies that what matters is not the size of your faith, but that you have faith at all and make good use of it.

Familiar with Greek drama and its conventions, Luke recounts Jesus’s words using exaggerated and graphic images to memorable effect: the mustard seed is one of the smallest to be found. ‘Mustard-seed’-sized faith can produce astounding results.

A mulberry uprooted and planted in the sea

Not only does a mulberry tree have a very deep and extensive root system, but it would be all but impossible to grow it in seawater.

Jesus gives his disciples another example of the unexpected effects of genuine faith.

Who among you would say to your servant ...?

This parable appears only in Luke’s Gospel. The evangelist uses the social hierarchy of his time so that his point is readily understood by his audience: he quotes a situation which will have appeared absurd to first-century readers. No master would eat after his servant. The disciples’ answer to Jesus’s question would clearly be ‘Of course not!’

We have only done what we were obliged to do

Here Jesus makes the point that the disciples have to act like humble slaves, not with a view to self-glorification or to earn God’s favour, but because he asked them to do that particular job. We cannot expect to attain God’s grace simply by doing what he asks us to do, any more than slaves would earn credit from obeying their masters’ orders. In today’s world, one might speak of serving God in our everyday activities without hoping for any other reward than the certainty of his love.

God’s grace is freely given to all.