

## 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 2, 2022

Reflections by Sister Susan Quaintance, OSB

Hab 1:2-3; 2:2-4; 2 Tm 1:6-8, 13-14; Lk 17:5-10

You don't need me to tell you that, in one way or another, all three of our readings today are about persevering in the face of difficulty. As I investigated the etymology of the word "perseverance," I made a list of synonyms: tenacity, steadfastness, constancy, endurance. And as I reflected on the challenge those words present in our national, civic, communal and personal lives these days, I chuckled to think that I have *vowed* stability. If there is anyone who should be able to model these virtues, to embody their meaning, it is me, us. Goodness.

Before we take that reality on, let's ponder it in the scriptures. Habakkuk's prophecy dates from between 605 and 597 BCE. Judah's situation was desperate; there was political intrigue and corruption, idolatry, and the looming (and very real) threat of the Babylonian emperor Nebuchnezzar. In language reminiscent of the Psalms of lament, Habakkuk challenges God. "How long, O Lord? I cry for help but you do not listen!" Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife and clamorous discord." But God's answer is clear: "The vision . . . will not disappoint. If it delays, wait for it." The just live because of their faith. As the New American Bible's note on this verse says, "the faith which here enables the virtuous to survive the impending doom is both a confident belief in God's justice and patience in awaiting its execution."

The second letter to Timothy, which like the other pastoral letters addressed to those who shepherded congregations, was written late in Paul's career – maybe by Paul, maybe not. Whether it was or it wasn't, the early church and its leaders were suffering. They had realized that Jesus's second coming wasn't as imminent as they had believed, and they had to figure out – as regular, human people – how to be the Body of Christ in a hostile world. Paul was imprisoned and Timothy, apparently and understandably, was timid in his proclamation of the gospel. In this pastoral pep talk, the author says, "Bear your share of the hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God."

Though the sayings on faith we hear from Luke might seem less relevant, they fit. Commentators say the apostles' request to "Increase our faith" was more of a show-offy fishing for a compliment from Jesus than a sincere recognition of their lack. Otherwise, why would Jesus have responded, "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed . . . "and tell them a story about servants who thought they should be rewarded for doing their job.

Sorry to say, sometimes I am that servant. I hear myself thinking, "I'm being good. Then why is it so hard?" I think about what our community faces, and I want God to reward us for so many years of good work, not sit there as the world presents us with difficult and painful choices. When I consider my life – beginning as it did as the Civil Rights movement was really starting to build steam – and I see the state of our country, I feel like we could give ancient Judah a run for their money in terms of corruption, idolatry, "strife and clamorous discord." Shouldn't we be better than this at this point? Are you sure, God, that the vision will be fulfilled?

This Sunday's answer seems to be "Yes." And not just "yes" theoretically but practically. I am being challenged to be the message of faith and hope; we all are. I like the idea of being a prophet of hope; living it is hard. What I want to do is hang on to something that Paul says in Romans: ". . . hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." It's not up to me to conjure up hope. It's given by God, through the Holy Spirit. I need to receive and steward it. It is a gift.

Stability. Perseverance. Tenacity. Steadfastness. Constancy. Endurance. Faith. Hope. Let us pray for each other.