Opinion
Spirituality



A volunteer with Catholic Street Missionaries interacts with a homeless man in early April 2017 in Vancouver, British Columbia. (CNS/Courtesy of Catholic Street Missionaries)



by Thomas Gumbleton

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All three of our readings today speak to us about faith. By that, we don't mean what happens when I go back to the chair after our sermon and we proclaim what we call a "profession of faith," where we list various mysteries and doctrines that we accept. No, this is something different, not simply a list of doctrines that we say we believe. It is entering into a very special relationship with God through Jesus. That's what faith is, a relationship.

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 6, 2019

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

Psalm 95

2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14

Luke 17:5-10

We hear that in the first lesson today when a prophet, Habakkuk, was preaching to the people at a time that, in some ways, seems almost like our own day: "How long must I cry for help and you pay no attention to me? I pray out to you, 'Violence!' and you do not save. Why do you make me see injustice? Are you pleased to tolerate tyranny? Destruction and violence are everywhere. There is strife and conflict abounds. The law has been put aside; just decrees are no longer obeyed."

There's no answer at first. The people become very discouraged. This is how faith works — when we enter into a relationship with God and then we listen deeply. We may speak and proclaim our needs and ask for God's help in various ways, but then at some point we have to listen. When the people in Habakkuk's town listened, God spoke: "Write down the vision, for this is a vision for the appointed time. It concerns

the end will not fail. Wait for it. The proud will never possess my favor, but the just, upright person will live by faith."

God is declaring that it may take a long time for God's vision, what God has prepared for the development of humanity, for the development of our relationships in this world with one another. But at some point, God's vision will be fulfilled. The just, good people live by faith, confident that God is at work and God is bringing about changes through us that will make the reign of God happen. We need faith, a relationship with God that enables us to have confidence to be at peace.

The same thing is happening in the Gospel. I presume those disciples were overwhelmed at first when Jesus said, "Don't forgive just 50 times, but 10 times 50 times." It's unlimited how many times you have to forgive.

That's a very difficult command on the part of Jesus. That's why the disciples plead with him: "Deepen our faith. Help us to trust, to have confidence, to be able to listen to you and follow you. We need faith."

Jesus then says, "It doesn't take very much. A mustard seed, the tiniest of all the seeds — if your faith is that much, it will grow and bring about the changes that are necessary."

That means we have to enter into this relationship with God, to listen to God's word, to take it into our minds and our hearts, and to follow it.

In fact, when Jesus goes on in today's Gospel, he speaks about a servant who fulfills all the commands he's been given and expects to be treated in a very gracious and abundant way. Jesus said, "No, you just did your duty." Why he brings this up is because sometimes we begin to think we can earn God's love, we can earn this gift of a relationship with God.

But we can't; it's a gift, so we don't pretend that we are going to earn anything. We simply open ourselves to God through Jesus. Every time we gather for the Eucharist as we are today, in our eucharistic prayer we remind ourselves that Jesus is in our midst when we gather in his name. He opens the Scriptures and breaks the bread. He's here in our midst if we open ourselves.

That's how we can bring about the healing on our world that we need, the healing in our everyday life, the healing that will bring peace and joy into our families, into our

community, and into our world, by being people of faith, people who listen deeply to the word of God and commit ourselves to follow it.

There are many ways that we can help to give witness to that faith, to deepen it, to help through faith to bring about the change that we know we need to make our world a better place.

But maybe most important is first of all, as I've already mentioned, simply being here every week in this community of faith, sharing with one another the faith we have, rejoicing in that faith with one another, and listening to God's word, being nourished by God's sacrament. But beyond that, as we carry our faith out into the world, it's not too difficult to think of things we need to do to witness to our faith, to put our faith into action.

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A very simple thing. (Do you remember? We all know this.) Jesus said, "When I was hungry you gave me to eat. When I was thirsty, you gave me to drink," and so on. Who of us hasn't come up to an intersection and seen a poor person with a cup, a hungry person, a homeless person? What's our attitude when that happens? Do you really see Jesus?

"When I was hungry, you gave me to eat. When I was homeless, you took me in." Do we really see Jesus? We should, because he lives in every one of those people because he said it: "When *I* was hungry ... when *I* was homeless."

So if we want to grow in our faith, we must at least change our attitude toward those who are poor in our midst and do whatever we can to bring about that reign of God where everyone has a chance for a full human life. Faith is not something easy. When we enter into a relationship with God through Jesus, we commit ourselves to love God first of all, but then to love one another as God loves us.

This is how we will live out our faith every day of our life and this is how we will end that violence, that hatred, the suffering that goes on everywhere. We will be those living our faith who make the reign of God come present in our midst.

Editor's note: *This homily was given Oct. 5 at St. Ambrose Church,* Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan*. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. Sign up here to receive an email alert when the latest*

homily is posted.