

October 2, 2016 Increase My Faith Homily:

Brothers and sisters, in the immediate aftermath of the second World War, a remarkable inscription was discovered on a cellar wall in the West German city of Cologne, where a number of Jews had hidden for the entire duration of the war. The inscription read:

"I believe in the sun even when it is not shining;
I believe in love even when feeling it not:
I believe in God even when he is silent"

What an extraordinary testimony of unwavering faith in the face of unspeakable cruelties inflicted on the Jewish people!

In today's first reading, we hear the prayer of a believer, Habakkuk, who is in great distress. Called "The Doctor of Perseverance" by the late Benedictine scholar, Huber Van Zeller, he enters into a spirited dialogue with the Almighty. "How long, O Lord? I cry for help but you do not listen", he cries (Hab.1:2). His prayer was likely inspired by the very real possibility of an impending disaster for the Jewish people: defeat at the hands of the powerful Babylonian armies, long-time antagonists of the Chosen People. "And the Lord answered him!" (Hab. 2:1) He calls for faithfulness and trust. There must be no room for doubt. However tough and redoubtable the course, the righteous person is called to a life of endurance, perseverance and fidelity. Failing to trust in God's power and his faithfulness to the covenant he established with Israel is not an option for the faithful.

It is worthy of note that the Lord insists that his response to the prophet be, "written clearly on the tablets so that one can read it readily" (Hab. 2:2). When I served in a Central New York parish, one of the most popular events of the year for the local people was an annual long distance race called "the Boilermaker" which was held in the city of Utica. What I found particularly striking were the number of spectators holding up placards in their hands as the race was in progress. The messages were meant to encourage the runners, such as "Keep it up", "Keep running", and "Just do it". In response to the question, "Why the need for the sign?", the typical reply was "To remind the participant in the race that he/she is not alone!" God speaks! He does not remain in the shadows! And the prophet has given us a precious transcription of the Lord's words of encouragement!

If we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that our Christian faith wavers in times of trial and tribulation. We recall the cry of Our Lord while dying on the cross. "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" We are sometimes besieged by doubts. One can surely understand the request of the disciples of Jesus in today's gospel: "Increase our faith" (Lk.17:5).

I am reminded of the dedicated pro-lifers, who continue to press on in the defense of the pre-born child despite many setbacks. Has their faith weakened after all the disappointments? Quite possibly! But they continue to soldier on. In their hearts, they know that the Good Lord will never desert them! And they are right!

May the Lord "increase our faith". In times of crisis, may we hold fast to our faith.
"But the just one, because of his faith, shall live" (Hab. 2:4).

Amen!