

**27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
October 3, 2010, 4 PM & 5:30 PM**

**J.A. Loftus, S.J.**

**Today's readings offer a meditation on the language of faith. They ought to be enlightening and consoling for all of us trying to live a life of faith.**

**There is an overarching theme in all of today's readings. The message basically is this: in the life of faith, always try to keep your eye on "the big picture." Don't let yourself get sucked-in by the distractions—distractions that can often leave us perplexed or even feeling hopeless.**

**Can you remember when you first learned to ride a bicycle? If you were lucky, you had someone telling you constantly not to keep looking down at your feet, but to keep your head up and aimed at where you wanted to go. Why was this such good advice? Because if you only pay attention to your feet, you end-up either wobbling all the way down the street or, if you're like me, running head-long into a tree. It is counter-intuitive advice to focus only on where you want to go, but it's the only way you learn to ride a bike.**

**Our readings today say much the same thing. Don't get lost in small anxieties about faith. "Big Picture" only!**

**Let's start with St. Luke's gospel. Jesus makes the point that we need to**

*expect* that faith will make a difference in our lives, and in our world. Faith *does* something; at the very least, it changes the way we view the world. But at the very most, it can re-distribute the energy of the planet. In faith, mulberry trees can learn to live under water. They really can—but only if you expect that it's possible. You have to keep your eye on what might, what can, happen. Stranger things have happened before! And they still do happen.

And Jesus says, furthermore, that this is the way it is supposed to be; for this we were created. So don't expect it to be a big deal; don't expect applause when faith does move mountains. It's supposed to! Living in faith is just doing what we're supposed to do—even if we feel like we don't know what we're doing. (That's the part about the unprofitable servant just doing what he is supposed to do.) Expect faith to move trees (and in other places, mountains) and it can. (We call this “positive psychology” in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century—and it is a booming new specialty within the social sciences. But it does work!) So don't bother dumping on yourself for your *lack* of faith. That's not Jesus' point. Just believe! And let yourself be surprised.

St. Paul adds a second perspective on faith that should make us feel even better. He says to his friend Timothy: “stir into flame the gift of God that you have.” He is reminding us that faith is sometimes like a dying wood fire. Faith sometimes needs to be fanned back into flame. You don't have to feel

bad about that in your own life; that's the nature of faith. It ebbs and flows; it flames sometimes, and sometimes it is barely a flicker.

In faith, as in so much else, some days are better than others. The Hebrew psalmists knew this so well. Hence a refrain like the one we hear from Psalm 95. *"If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts."* *"If!"* The implication is that it won't necessarily happen everyday that we hear God's voice; that, too, is in the nature of faith. Relax!

I am reminded of a similar line from the wonderful Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins: "I greet him on the days I meet him, and bless when I understand." But the clear implication is that some days I may neither meet nor greet him.

And a final perspective on faith comes from the prophet Habakkuk. He tries to answer the question how long will it take until my faith is more certain, compete, final? And his simple answer is: a whole lifetime. It is, of course, the football season (Go Eagles!) and the fall of the year. Remember Charlie Brown from Peanuts? Every fall, he tried to kick an extra point. Every fall, crabby Lucy, holding the football, would pull the ball away at the last minute, and poor Charlie ends up on his behind. Finally, Shultz actually has Charlie Brown quote, in Latin mind you, the opening lines from the prophet Habakkuk that we just heard. The very same line!

**From his embarrassed position on his...behind, he shouts to the heavens: *Quam dieu , Domine, quam dieu?* How long, O lord, how long? And in the final frame, Lucy quietly says back: “All your life, Charlie Brown. All your life.”**

**Today reminds us faith is like that too. We get up; we fall down; and people always seem to be pulling the ball out from under us. But faith is the vision *in God’s eye* that can uproot trees, and move mountains, and burst into flame in the most unlikely times and places. Let God be God—for a change!**

**The message is clear: stop focusing on the small stuff. Keep your eye on the ball, on what *is* possible in faith. Pretend you are back on your first bike ride. When you start to wobble, when that tree looms larger and larger in front of you, lift up your head, focus your eyes ahead, and let God do the hard work for you. That’s what real faith allows. It’s not about the small stuff in life that annoys us all. It’s about the big stuff—life itself that is always in God’s hands anyway. So relax and enjoy the ride. Someone else is really in charge.**