



Tenth Sunday Ordinary Time 2005

Hosea 6: 3-6 Romans 4: 18-25 Matthew 9: 9-13

All the readings today speak of faith and hope. It is good to reflect on how our stories from scripture provide us with images of hope.

Listen to Paul speak of Abraham, "Hoping against hope, Abraham believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it was once told him, "Numerous as this shall your descendants be." Without growing weak in faith he thought of his own body, which was as good as dead, and of the dead womb of his wife Sarah. Yet he never questioned or doubted God's promise."

What an extraordinary tribute. It is not often we face such a challenge to faith. Perhaps one of the biggest is the loss of a spouse or child when all appears senseless, when no words about God's love will fill the void; or if we have to embrace as brothers and sisters those who challenge our comfortable world. Faith is often like the air we breathe, we are not conscious of our need for it until we are threatened with its loss.

In the gospel we have the story of the call of Matthew the taxman. On the surface it seems to have nothing to do with faith or hope. As a story it is the essence of brevity. Jesus saw a man in the tax office, he said, "Follow me." The man got up and followed him. The tax office was a kind of toll booth which collected the taxes of goods, like fish, moving out of the region. Revenue collectors are never popular and in Jesus' day they were suspected of collecting more than was lawful. To be expected to make such people welcome and work with them was a challenge to their sense of specialness.

As in our days people are classified into groups according to how society ranks them. In our religious circles it's no different. Jesus, by example, tried to break down these artificial boundaries that have no place in God's world. Prejudging the worth of others is a huge block to community. The Pharisees who lived by strict rules of conduct felt that those who didn't do so, needed to be shunned as a protection against contamination.

People who were lax in their religious living through carelessness, ignorance or through the pressure of their working lives were often called sinners. Jesus makes it clear that such people, poor in spirit, were his concern because they were God's concern.

Matthew has Jesus quote Hosea in his indictment of the self-righteous. This passage is from our first reading.

Hosea is lamenting on the loss of faith shown by his people. He is particularly concerned with their insincere conversion. He accused the tribes of "shifting the

boundaries” that is of doing things to suit themselves rather than being faithful to the covenant. He compares their piety to the early morning mist that burns off at the rising of the sun. At the same time as God castigates the people for their infidelity he reminds them that their sufferings are a call to conversion.

“For it is love I desire, not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings. ... For I came not to call the righteous but sinners.”

“Go and learn what this means.” says Jesus.

Jesus never tried to convince through clever arguments. He always led people back to the Word of God.

Jesus says, “Go and learn.” He doesn’t say “Go and read.” because the Word of God must be pondered on, carried in the heart until we put on the mind of God. When this happens then we become as welcoming as Jesus ready to help those who are heavily burdened.

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