



***Twenty Seventh Sunday Ordinary Time***

Habakkuk 1:2-3, 2:2-4 2Timothy 1: 6-8, 13-14 Luke 17:5-9

The prophet Habakkuk, whose name means to embrace passionately, had some passionate words to address to God. He accuses God of not listening to his pain and of not being attentive to the misery of the people. God answers gently and with patience. He tells Habakkuk that the divine dream is gestating, that there is still time than must run before the fulfilment. The emergence of the new creation will take time. Some things can't be hurried. To induce birth is to risk damage.

Our prayer is often the prayer of desperation. We cry out to God like a child. Help me, listen to me, now! In the reading we learn that God's silence is not absence or indifference but a watchful presence. Like a parent watching a baby's fist tentative steps.

The scriptures show us how our ancestors struggled to understand God. They knew that God cared for them but they wanted concrete signs. Sometimes they judged God on how quickly their prayers were heard. Like children they measured love by how quickly they got what they wanted. Like children they were not always interested in what God wanted from them.

Luke's story about the servant is directed to the disciples. It tells us that if we want to work alongside God it will be both hard and demanding. Just as Habakkuk expected God to be at his beck and call so will people make demands on us. We have to learn the patience of God; to keep going when we would rather knock off. Our prayer is the prayer of the disciple. It is a prayer which says, "Show me Lord" rather than "You do it God".

Take the example of redundancy. It's a painful situation that some of us have had to face. How do we pray as disciples? First, like Habakkuk we will be angry and feel that God has let us down. We may express this anger in passionate words. Our tradition tells us that it is safe to express this anger as God understands our needs. We will feel angry, and rightly so, about the systems that value profits over people. We will be afraid of the future and worry about our ability to cope.

If we truly believe that God is our friend then we will take all our concerns to God. We will say, "Show me how to gather up the broken bits and make something new."

In prayer we don't get neat solutions. Answers come in fragments. We have to know where to look and how to see; a word from a stranger, time spent with a friend, a line from scripture, an item in the newspaper. God speaks in a multitude of ways. We then ask for the wisdom to make good choices from the answers we have received. Even then the answer may not be complete. It may take more time, more wrestling in the half light before we feel that we can move on.

In the letter to Timothy we hear,  
"Stir into flame the gift of God.  
The Spirit given to us is no cowardly spirit  
but one that makes us strong, loving and wise."

It is the Spirit within us who helps us to pray for ourselves and for the grace to respond to the prayers of others. However, the flame may be buried under the ashes. It needs the breath of God to bring it back to life.

Patricia Stevenson rsj.