

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

“If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this sycamore: ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you. Luke 17, 5-10

“Hold firmly to the truth that I taught you, as the example for you to follow, and remain in the faith and love that are ours in union with Christ Jesus.” 2 Tim 1, 13-14



Anyone who has ever worked in a classroom, knows that teachers learn much more from students than they ever teach them. Every now and then, teachers are humbled by what students say and write. This is about the time of year when school graduates seek to gain early entrance to universities. Some universities ask students to explain why they believe they should be admitted to particular courses. What they write is not always inspirational. However, let me share with you something one applicant wrote:

“I’m not a particularly good student, nor am I a leader. If the truth be known, I’m a pretty average kind of person. I have to work really hard for the marks I get...For the last three lots of school holidays I have worked as a volunteer with Camp Quality, an organisation which supports kids with cancer. At first I was terrified that I would say something stupid or do something to embarrass them and add to their pain. However, I was surprised at how much I enjoyed working with these kids. And I’ve been even more surprised at what I’ve learned from them about life and death, about coping with severe illness and disappointment, about what really matters. Eventually, I would like to work full-time with children who are terminally ill or physically challenged. So, I would like to study for a degree in education and psychology so that I might give these kids something of what they have given me.” (reproduced with permission)

Applications like this are pure gold, for they reveal the kind of qualities that today’s gospel reading holds up to us.

Jesus describes the kind of faith we need to grow into if we are to be authentic and credible followers of his. He makes it clear that faith in him and his gospel makes a claim on us. If we are to be genuine disciples of Jesus, we have no option but to imitate what he did. Consequently, we are to reach out to others in love and support and encouragement, to bring healing with a word of comfort and affirmation, to lift up with a smile or by lending a listening ear.

If you care to visit the “First People” website on your computer, you will find a long list of American Indian legends. Among them is a delightful Anishnabe legend entitled *How the Fly Saved the River*:

“Many, many years ago when the world was new, there was a beautiful river. Fish in great numbers lived in this river, and its water was so pure and sweet that all the animals came there to drink. A giant moose heard about the river and he, too, came to drink there. But he was so big, and he drank so much, that soon the water began to sink lower and lower. The beavers were worried. The water around their lodges was disappearing. Soon their homes would be destroyed. The muskrats were worried,

too. What would they do if the water vanished? How could they live? The fish were very worried. The other animals could live on land if the water dried up, but they couldn't. All the animals tried to think of a way to drive the moose from the river, but he was so big that they were too afraid to try. Even the bear was afraid of him. At last, the fly said that he would try to drive the moose away. All the animals laughed and jeered. How could a tiny fly frighten a giant moose? The fly said nothing, but that day, as soon as the moose appeared, he went into action. He landed on the moose's foreleg and bit sharply. The moose reacted by stamping his foot. So the fly kept biting and the moose stamped his foot even harder, and each time he stamped, the ground sank and the water rushed in to fill it up. Then the fly jumped about all over the moose, biting and biting and biting until the moose was in a frenzy. He dashed madly about the banks of the river, shaking his head, stamping his feet, snorting and blowing, but he couldn't get rid of that nagging fly. At last the moose fled from the river, and didn't come back. 'Even the small can fight the strong,' the fly explained, 'if they give their attention to how they can use what little they have.'"

In today's gospel, Jesus tells us that if we have faith in God, even the size of a mustard seed, we can face any challenge. Mustard-seed faith empowers us to do much more than uproot cypress trees. Such faith is the unshakable conviction that every act of kindness, however insignificant, has the power to heal; that the smallest initiative for justice can help change the world as it makes a difference to our little part of it. Jesus challenges all of us who dare to be his disciples to embrace the hope of the "mustard seed": hope that God's Spirit of compassion, generosity and justice will be the seed that one day grows into the reign of God in our world.