

27 Sunday Ordinary Time C 2016  
October 2  
Frazee/Callaway

Have you ever downloaded one of those vocabulary enhancing apps? You receive a new word everyday day, and, before you know it, you will be a millionaire, just because you use big words that nobody can understand.

If I were the app, today's word would be "rebuke." Rebuke means to express sharp disapproval of someone because of their actions or behavior.

A few verses before today's gospel reading, Jesus says to his disciples, "If your brother sins, rebuke him." We are not very good at this. I would rather look the other way than stare sin in the face and rebuke the sinner. I don't want to appear to be judgmental or act like I am *better than thou*. Our culture says that all things are relative, so even if something is wrong for ME, it may not be wrong for YOU. As far as I am concerned, we can banish rebuke from the Christian vocabulary. But...

Jesus said, "If your brother sins, rebuke him; if he repents, forgive him. And if he wrongs you seven times in one day and returns to you seven times saying, 'I am sorry,' you should forgive him."

These are the verses that give way to the disciples turning to Jesus and asking, "Lord, increase our faith." It seems that, like us, the disciples had little stomach for rebuking. They concluded that it might be a matter of faith, that if their faith would increase, so would their courage, the strength of their witness, their wisdom and prudence not only for rebuking but for forgiving.

In his response, Jesus suggests that it may not be a matter of faith. "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea' and it would obey you." If we have the slightest speck of faith, it is enough.

Jesus diverts our attention from faith to obedience and service, "When you have done all that you have been commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.'"

What if...to rebuke your brother was a matter of obligation, and not really a choice? What if our Christian witness was not a matter of courage but of obedience?

I have a niece who worked as a life-guard over the summer. When a life guard is on duty, she doesn't consider whether or not she will save a drowning child. She does it. It is her job. It is her obligation. At that moment she relies on her training—in a sense, she has faith in herself; but faith is not the issue. She simply does all that is required of her.

Someone caught up in sin, whether it be me or your friend or your sister, are we not drowning? Sin and he who inspired sin, want to extinguish the light of Christ that is in us. He wants us to breath, not the fresh air of new life, but the stale, suffocating air of eternal damnation. A rebuke is not a matter a matter of faith or courage; it is purely and simply our work. We want all people to know the depth of God's love and mercy, which cannot be encountered without repentance.

Some days we, like the disciples, want to scream out, "Lord, increase our faith!" Jesus responds, "Be my servant. Do what I have commanded you to do."

October 1 we celebrated the memorial of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, St. Therese of Lisieux. For her, the great saints were like inaccessible mountains, and she was only an obscure grain of sand. But she was not discouraged. She knew that the scriptures were filled with images of our littleness and weakness with respect to God, and of his care for us in our insignificance. Her "Little Way" means taking God at his word and letting his love for us wash away our sins and imperfections. If we cannot advance to heaven in giant strides, we can do it in tiny little steps. In those steps we are to take others with us.

Soon we will approach the table of the Lord. It is not our faith that makes Jesus present here; it is by his word that he is here. It is not our good works of charity and love that have summoned him here; rather he is here to teach us how to love.

This we know for certain: he is here! "Lord, increase our faith." What he said to his apostles he says to us--your faith is enough!