

Homily for the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

“Why do bad things happen to good people?”

That’s at the heart of Habakkuk’s lament in the first scripture today. But the prophet takes it even a step farther. He’s frustrated by the violence, the misery and ruin all around him and he wants to know why God doesn’t do something about it!

When you and I, or someone we love, is faced with suffering, disappointment, illness, pain that seems to have no end, we often ask God,
“Why? Why me? Why my family? Why them?
Why the innocent? Why?”

These are ancient questions, they’ve been asked in every generation of humankind’s history.

And God’s response, when it comes (and often it seems not to come at all), God responds to our lament as he answered Habakkuk:
“Write down the vision lest you forget it. The vision still has its time, it presses on to fulfillment, it will not disappoint, and if it delays - wait for it! It will surely come. It will not be late.”
And if such a response disappoints or angers us, if God’s answer doesn’t satisfy, then either God is weak or a fool -- or we don’t understand.

My educated guess is that the problem is ours and not God’s.

There are three misunderstandings about our relationship with God that can easily shape our lives of faith - and scriptures like today’s bring them to the surface.

Three misunderstandings:

- 1) We sometimes think that God owes us something. We begin to think that if we lead good lives then certainly good health and good fortune should be ours.
- 2) We sometimes think that since God doesn’t want suffering, if we do suffer, it’s because either God is angry with us for something we’ve done, or because for some reason he’s just stopped caring about us.
- 3) We sometimes think that God’s vision of happiness for us must surely match our own because, after all,

who would know better than we - where and how we'll find our joy?

Such misunderstandings slip into our spiritual lives
when we begin to mix up who's who in our relationship with God.

That's what Jesus is getting at in the gospel story,
reminding us that the servant who's only done a day's work
shouldn't expect his master to begin waiting on him.
Servants are simply expected to be loyal to the one they serve.

But that's where it begins to get uncomfortable.
Most of us don't feature ourselves as servants -
after all - we're the "people of God!"

But, that's the misunderstanding!

The people of God ARE the servants of God.

That doesn't mean we're God's slaves,
but it does mean that we are meant to serve the Lord, loyally,
and, in serving God,
to find the vision and seek the joy
that comes of serving the One who made us.

In fact, in the reading from Habakkuk and from Luke,
the Hebrew and Greek words translated as "faith"
might be better translated as "steadfast loyalty" --
that very brand of loyalty and love that stand firm
even in the face of suffering, pain
in the face of dashed dreams and failed expectations

The good news is that the Lord, our Master, does offer us much more
than the call to serve him and his Word.

- He is the Master who knows every suffering his servants have endured
because he has shared in that suffering in his death on the Cross.

- He is the Master who walks alongside us
living with us in the suffering that each of us knows in this life.

- He is the Master whose vision of joy for us is greater, broader, deeper
than any we might possibly dream.

- He is the Master who, every hour of every day and night,
helps us to seek, to work for, to find a share in that joy even now.

And Jesus is the Master who, at the end of the day,
does put on an apron, and wait on us, and call us to his table,

inviting us to share in the food and drink of the Eucharist.

So, as St. Paul urged Timothy and urges us,
"Stir into flame the gift of God that you have..."

Stir into flame your gift of faith, that steadfast loyalty,
which has brought you thus far
and through which the Lord will bring each of us to joy
for that vision still has its time; it presses on to fulfillment;
it will not disappoint; if it delays, wait for it;
it will surely come.
And you, because of your steadfast loyalty, shall live.

- *Rev. Austin H. Fleming*