

How Long, O Lord?

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

CYCLE C

Habakkuk 1:2-3; 2:2-4
2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14
Luke 17:5-10

GATHERING

(As people arrive, the person hosting this session collects copies of the newspapers that people have brought with them. The facilitator may have a couple of extra copies on reserve in case someone has forgotten to bring one. The newspapers are laid out on a table or on the floor in the midst of the community. An open bible is placed on top of the newspapers.)

This week's scripture challenges us both to confront the violence which surrounds us and, at the same time, believe ever more deeply that God is at work in the world. Members take some time to re-connect with each other at the start and to share some sense of how they have lived in response to the gospel this past week.

OPENING PRAYER

(An internet recording of John Michael Talbot's, "Come Let Us Worship the Lord" or some other appropriate music is played. Members sing along as they are able.)

The facilitator asks people to take up a copy of the newspaper and, in silence, to look through the paper to take note of stories of "destruction

and violence...strife and clamorous discord". After a time, the facilitator invites members to briefly mention the title of the story and a few words or a sentence that touches on the basic content of the story.

As each person finishes his/her reference to a story, the community prays: "How long, O Lord? I cry for help but you do not listen!"

When everyone is finished mentioning a story, the community observes several minutes of silence.)

Focus Question

How has violence or discord touched your life?

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause between readings.)

Commentary

Whether it be from drive-by shootings, celebrated murder cases, ethnic cleansing, or bombings of public buildings, the blood in the streets abounds. The images come at us pell-mell, pouring over us, from television, films, newspapers, magazines. Where is our God in the midst of it all?

Whose are the voices that cry out in our time, pleading with God for relief? They are, among others, abused spouses, battered children, the ignored homeless, victims of terrorist acts, the innocent non-combatants in ethnic and tribal conflicts. The words of the prophet Habakkuk seem as if they were given voice just today: "I cry out to you, 'Violence!' but you do not intervene."

Even apart from the spilling of blood, strife and discord abound. The decibel level of public conversation, the meanness in our discourse about public policy, and the adversarial spirit that drags anything and everything into court, all of these things shape and define so much of what makes up life today. Where is our God in the midst of it all?

There are two voices that speak to us in the reading from Habakkuk, that of the lamenting prophet, and that of the God who promises deliverance. The historical circumstances of Habakkuk's complaint are not clear, but his overriding message is sure. Through his prophet, God reaffirms that he is at work in our lives and in our world. If we are faithful, God promises that the vision (i.e., the promised reign of the peaceable kingdom to come) will not disappoint, even if it delays.

What does it mean for us to be faithful, even as we lament and cry out to God for justice and peace? Not all are guilty of the violence that abounds, but we are all responsible to find ways to deal with it, with the deep down things in our hearts and in our society that breed ugliness, despair and destruction. Paul promises us that the spirit God has given us will empower us with strength, love and wisdom. In God's Spirit there is the promise of life.

The disciples in this week's gospel plead for an increase of faith. They ask for *more* and Jesus responds that as *little* faith as that of the size of a mustard seed is enough. Faith is not a matter of quantity, it is a matter of quality. It is that disposition of openness to the power of God at work within us and within our world. It is openness to the overwhelming love of God that is poured forth. Though the streets run red, the blood of the Lord poured out promises, even when the promise tarries, that the just person, because of faith, shall live.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

(The community pauses for several minutes in silence to ponder the scriptures and the questions which follow.)

1. When have you wondered or worried about whether or not God was really at work in your life?
2. How confident are you that God is present working things out in our world? Where does your confidence come from?
3. Where might there be "destruction and violence, strife and discord" to which you somehow contribute, perhaps even in spite of yourself?

4. To whom, among those who cry out today for God to intervene, can you or your community listen and be a sign of God's care?
5. What has faith enabled you to do that you would otherwise have found too difficult?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

Suggestions:

1. In moments of discord among family members or friends this week, invite people to pause, not to ignore the disagreement, but to reflect quietly for a few minutes about what is needed for the good of all.
2. Reach out to victims of domestic violence. Contact a social services office in your area to see how you may be of support to these hurting people.
3. Help a frail or disabled person (e.g. by doing shopping for a senior citizen). Call your parish or the Charities/Catholic Family Services in your area for information about how you might help.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

All: If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts.

Reader: Come, let us sing joyfully to the Lord;
let us acclaim the rock of our salvation.
Let us greet him with thanksgiving;
let us joyfully sing psalms to our God.

All: If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts.

Reader: Come, let us bow down in worship;
let us kneel before the Lord who made us.
For he is our God,

and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides.

All: If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts.

Reader: Oh, that today you would hear God's voice:
"Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,
as in the day of Massah in the desert.
Where your fathers tempted me;
they tested me though they had seen my works."

All: If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts.

(Members take up the newspapers again. Some silent time is allowed for people to peruse the paper for signs of hope, hints of where God is at work in the world about us. The facilitator then invites members to mention in a few words, or just a sentence, a story which offers hope and a sign of grace at work around us.

*As each person finishes his/her mention of a story, the community prays:
"The Spirit God has given us . . . makes us strong, loving and wise."*

The session concludes with the Lord's Prayer.)

