



Bringing Home the Word

27TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME October 6, 2013

Things to Do While We Wait

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Studies now tell us that multitasking isn't really as efficient as we've been led to believe, but daydreaming—or even napping—can lead to breakthroughs in solving difficult problems. Time we might consider “wasted” sometimes proves to be the most fruitful.

Today's first reading, from the prophet Habakkuk, can offer us some inspiration for those waiting times. He speaks to a people historically restless for salvation:

*The vision still has its time,
presses on to fulfillment, and will not
disappoint;
if it delays, wait for it,
it will surely come, it will not be late.*

SUNDAY READINGS

Habakkuk 1:2-3; 2:2-4

A prophet wonders when God will come to save the people. He does not have to wait long to find an answer.

2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14

Paul urges Timothy to be fervent and faithful in his ministry. The Holy Spirit will be at hand to help him.

Luke 17:5-10

Jesus teaches the apostles that it is not a matter of needing more faith but rather of putting one's faith into practice.

The most significant things in life can't be hurried: birth, death, the growth of a child, recovery after an injury, the blossoming—or healing—of a relationship. A year ago I spent most of September and October traveling between Ohio and Wisconsin, waiting for my mother's death. At the same time my youngest niece was waiting for the birth of her daughter. My sister and I remarked at the similarity of our all-night vigils around both events—and our inability to do anything about the waiting!

Waiting and faith are connected. We can wait patiently when we have faith that the outcome will be worth the wait, when we understand the reason behind the waiting. Often our impatience with waiting has more to do with doubt and uncertainty than with the time itself.

In the Gospel, the disciples ask Jesus to increase their faith, as though faith were something that could be measured. He tells them it's not a question of needing more faith. It's doing what that faith tells us we can—and must—do. Not necessarily uprooting mulberry trees, but perhaps uprooting the prejudice that keeps us from pursuing real justice in our society, or the carelessness that sets in motion a mindless cycle of consumption and waste that threatens to destroy our planet.

The changes that need to happen, whether in our own lives or in the life of our world, aren't going to happen overnight. In most cases, the things went wrong over a long period of time, and the healing, too, will be slow in coming. But come it will, if we have faith in the rightness of God's plan.

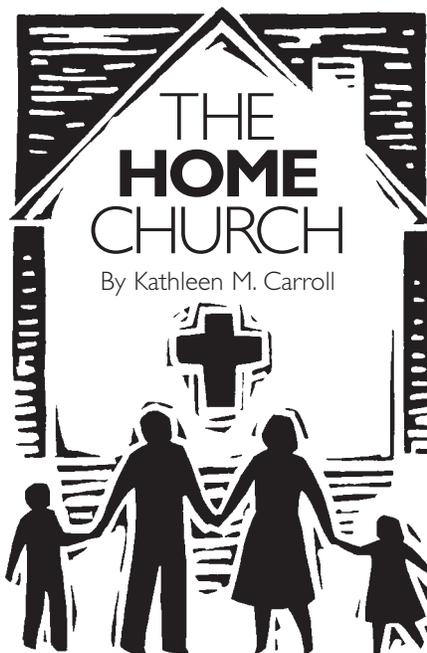
So what can we do while we wait? First of all, we can pray. We can pray to see what God has to teach us through the very act of waiting. We can pray for the patience to wait for the unfolding of God's plan. And we can look for the in-between steps that we might take to bring about the fulfillment of that plan.

In response to their request for more faith, Jesus poses to his disciples a question about service. He perceives that what they're asking for is not necessarily faith but rather a life without worry or hardship or effort. He reminds them they are called to work in the kingdom of God.

The words of the prophets call us to have faith in our unique abilities, our God-given talents, in the vision that waits to be fulfilled in our lives. This is the kind of faith Jesus tells his disciples they already have. This is the kind of faith we have, whether we know it or not. We might be unprofitable servants, but all God asks is that we do what we are called to do. 

REFLECTION
QUESTIONS
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REFLECTION

- What would you do if God increased your faith? What might happen if you do it anyway?
- Recall an experience of waiting for something that seemed long-delayed. What did you learn from it?
- What gives you hope in times of waiting?



“I have done what is mine to do. May Christ show you what is yours to do.” Francis said this to his friars when he was on his deathbed. The Franciscan family recalls this saying each year when they celebrate the *Transitus*, the commemoration of the night Francis passed from this life to eternal life. These words, and indeed the whole celebration, are both a remembrance of Francis’s life and a sending forth into the future for each one of us.

To his last breath, Francis was concerned that his followers not try merely to imitate what he had done. From gathering stones to rebuild the church at San Damiano to dressing in sack cloth to overcoming his repugnance of lepers, Francis’s actions were his own way of living the commands in the Gospel.

Too often we look at St. Francis or one of the other saints we admire and wish we could live their lives. But those saints are the first to tell us that we are to follow the Lord and to live the Gospel in whatever ways seem best suited to our own lives. We have our own sins and obstacles to overcome, our own gifts to bring to the table.

May Christ show us how we are to follow him.

Every parent hears it sooner or later: “Jane’s mom lets her do it.” “Dave has a cell phone.” “All the other kids are going.” I had a merciless approach to corking this whine. I grabbed some stats on what *all* the other kids (worldwide) were really doing: walking six miles a day to fetch water, going blind from vitamin A deficiency, subsisting on half-cups of rice—you get the idea, and so did my children.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus takes a similar tack: Even if we did all we are supposed to do (and none of us can quite manage that), should we expect to be treated any better than people treat their servants? It’s only human to want to be rewarded for good work (or even merely for good effort), but thinking we *deserve* God’s consideration is quite another thing.

Luckily for us, God isn’t always so strict about meting out justice; we’re far more likely to find ourselves on the receiving end of endless mercy. Most of us don’t get what we deserve—we get far better.

PRAYER

“Lord, increase our faith,”
we cry.

Yet every day we overlook
how our faith keeps us
moving forward.

Faith helps us
get up in the morning,
faith soothes us to sleep
at night.

Lord, help us to believe in
the faith you have given us,
and to act on that faith
for the good of all.

WEEKDAY
READINGS

Monday	Jon 1:1—2:2, 11/Lk 10:25-37	Thursday	Mal 3:13-20b/Lk 11:5-13
Tuesday	Jon 3:1-10/Lk 10:38-42	Friday	Jl 1:13-15; 2:1-2/Lk 11:15-26
Wednesday	Jon 4:1-11/Lk 11:1-4	Saturday	Jl 4:12-21/Lk 11:27-28