

Homily for the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

“Location, location, location.” If you have ever had any experience in the real estate world, you would know that the location of any home can add or detract from the price. Location is often the first consideration in the value of any piece of property.

The rule of “location, location, location” is also applicable to our understanding of any passage from the Gospels. This weekend’s Gospel story about the frustration of the disciples only lends itself to understanding when you can comprehend the location of the passage relative to what went before it.

If you were to examine the three or four verses prior to the disciples’ plea to “increase our faith,” you would discover that Jesus is speaking about forgiveness. Jesus is instructing His followers on their need to be ministers of forgiveness. Jesus says to them: “If your brother wrongs you seven times a day and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I’m sorry,’ you need to forgive him.”

The response of the disciples is exceedingly human. They can’t even begin to grasp how they can do that. And so they say to Christ,

“If you want us to be that forgiving, you had better help us out....you had better ‘increase our faith.’”

Jesus’ response is ever so clear. They already have the faith that they are asking for. God has already graced their lives with faith. Now they must learn to use it. Or, in the words of St. Paul in today’s second reading, they need to “stir into flame the gift of God.” But to use faith, to rest on faith, to inflame this gift of God, is to first and foremost learn that you are not in charge...God is. And you have to be humble enough to let go of the need to be “in charge” so that God can empower you to act.

How difficult is it to forgive? How many times do we cringe at the thought of forgiving someone who has hurt us? How many of us carry grudges or harbor anger? This Gospel tries to answer those questions by telling us that we will always be burdened with our inability to forgive until we can let go and let God be in charge.

Forgive seven times? It is impossible if it rests solely on our shoulders. But when we learn to rest not on ourselves but on God, everything...everything, even our capacity to forgive, becomes more than possible...it becomes a reality.

This is the power of faith that is only the size of a mustard seed!