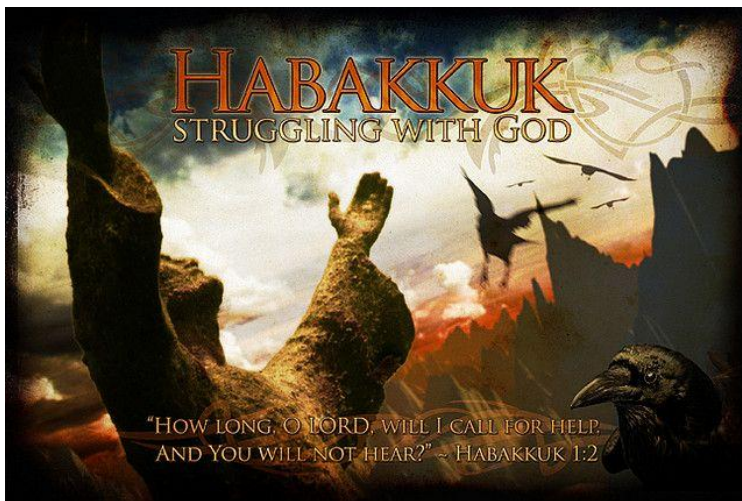


## Homily for Sunday, October 5, 2025

Let's try to get a little bit of context in order to discern what God might be saying to us in these bizarre readings we have today. The first reading comes from the Prophet Habakkuk. This reading reminds me of the Acadian Deportation of 1755



when the British deported the Acadians from this region to places as far away as Louisiana. As you know, if we don't learn our history, we are doomed to repeat it. In Habakkuk's time, the Babylonians violently took over the country of Judah,

sacked the capital city of Jerusalem, and were in the process of destroying the most sacred site for the Jews—the Temple. People were running for their lives. Much like the Acadians, the Jews were about to be deported. Exiled in Babylon, everything they valued was taken from them.

A discouraged Habakkuk sees all this unfolding around him and says, "Lord, I'm crying for help. Don't you hear me? All I see is wrongdoing and violence; I can't take much more of it. I need you to step in and stop this destruction." Sometimes, after watching the news, I feel like saying the same thing, "Lord, step in and do something, anything, as I can't take much more of the bad news around me."

God doesn't intervene in the way Habakkuk hoped for nor in the way I hope for. Instead he tells Habakkuk to write the vision and make it big enough that a runner might read it. As people are running for their lives from the Babylonians, God wanted Habakkuk to hold up a sign of hope in the middle of the chaos and destruction. We are not told what the vision, the message on the placard was, but I suspect it may have read, "This too will pass" or, "I have not forgotten you" or "Every child matters." Maybe God wanted Habakkuk himself to be a sign of hope for others who are struggling. Whatever the vision was, it was God's vision, and it would endure in the end, as God's vision always does. God's vision for humanity has nothing to do with violence, fear, broken relationships, war, and the killing of innocent people. God says to the Prophet Jeremiah, a contemporary of Habakkuk, "When the deportation in Babylon is over, I will bring my people back to Judah and care for them. My plans are not for disaster but to give them the future they have always hope for" (Jer. 29:11). 50 years later, they did return.

Similarly, the gospel about the mustard seed, the mulberry tree, and the servants who see themselves as "worthless slave" needs some explaining. After all, running for your life from the Babylonians and having Jesus call us "worthless slave" hardly sounds like Good News! Again, a little context will help.

Just prior to this gospel passage, Jesus told his Apostles that if someone wrongs you seven times and expresses sorrow each time, you must forgive that person each and every time. The Apostles knew deep down that none of them was capable of going to the well seven times to bring up that much forgiveness even for the most repentant person. Rather than complaining that this seemed

impossible, they said instead, ***“Lord, increase our faith.”*** That’s where we pick up the story today. The Apostles look at a situation, a challenge in their lives—the challenge of forgiving that much—and conclude it’s impossible. Why is it impossible? Because they don’t have the resources to do it. So, their strategy is to bring in more resources from the outside. Thus, their demand, “Increase our faith. Whatever we got isn’t enough; we need more!”

Jesus doesn’t grant the Apostles’ wish any more than God granted Habakkuk’s wish 600 years prior. Jesus is more into quality of faith and not quantity of faith. He doesn’t think they need more. He reminds them that if they had faith the size of a mustard seed, which they do, that would be enough. They don’t need an infusion of more faith from the outside, the cavalry riding in with more resources to solve their problems. What they needed then, and what we need now, is to use the faith they have, not the faith they would like to have. If they leaned into the little faith they had, it would be enough to tell the mulberry tree to be uprooted and move on, and it would have to obey them. Apparently, the mulberry tree’s roots are so penetrating that trying to uproot it is impossible. He thinks they can do the impossible.

Jesus is affirming the Apostles and us. He sees something in us that we often don’t see in ourselves. Jesus is not naïve to our personal troubles or the seemingly overwhelming troubles of the world we live in. Beyond it all, he sees a potential within us to transform fear into hope, sickness into health, loneliness into communion, and even death into life. On day one, in Jesus’ first public speech, a speech that would set the tempo for his entire ministry, Jesus looks at us and says,

***“You are the light of the world.”*** He could have said, “I’m the light of the world,” which would have been true. He could have said, “I’m your teacher, Lord and master so bow down and worship me. Put your apron on and serve me while I eat and drink, and later, if I have deemed you worthy enough, you can eat.” He didn’t say that either. He said, “You’re the light of the world. Just let it shine and don’t ever put it under a bushel basket” (Mt. 5).

Doesn’t St. Paul say the same thing, but in a slightly different way, when he writes to his friend Timothy saying, ***“Beloved, I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you...”*** It’s already within you. You just have to rekindle what’s already there. Can you believe that the mustard-sized faith in you is enough? Can you believe that you are the light of the world in Jesus’ eyes and you don’t have to live up to or down to anyone else’s expectations? Can you believe there is a gift already within you just waiting to be rekindled, a gift the world needs?

When you know this truth deep within you, it’s more than enough to sustain you. When you don’t know it, you gravitate to the outer world, the world of “look at me,” the world of outer gratification, the world of recognition, the world of honours, and medals.

The most repeated story in the four gospels is the story of the feeding of the multitude where Jesus, as you know, fed over 5,000 hungry mouths with just five loaves and two fish. It’s the mustard seed story all over again, is it not? The story of the hungry crowd starts with what seems to be an impossible challenge. Feeding 5,000 people with the meager resources of five loaves and two fish just

wasn't going to cut it. The Apostles' suggestion was to go into the neighbouring town and get more food. They thought they needed resources from out there to solve a problem that was right here. Jesus either corrects them or scolds them by saying, "That's enough!" The loaves and the fish were the tiny mustard seeds within them just waiting to germinate, sprout, grow and turn into abundance.

I secretly admire people who I think are leading heroic lives. Daily, they stand by a child who has a permanent disability or keep going to the wall for a child with a chronic addiction. Yet these parents would be the first to say, "We're not special. We're only doing what we ought to do." I think of a man who faithfully fed his wife lunch at the nursing home for years, even though she didn't know who he was because of her Alzheimer's. If I was to say to him, "You're my hero" he'd probably say back to me, "Me? A hero? No, I'm only doing what I promised on my wedding day, staying by her side in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I'm only doing what I ought to be doing."

Joseph, a 40-year-old man who has been incarcerated since he was 17, shared this insight when we celebrated Mass at Dorchester Penitentiary on Thursday. He said, "This gospel reminds me of the late Mother Teresa. She never looked for accolades or rewards. She was even puzzled that anyone would want to write a book about her life. Her only concern was service to others, just doing what ought to be done."

He's right. When we are at our best as human beings, we are not concerned primarily with being praised, rewarded or promoted. Instead, like servants we do

our daily tasks of caring for each other in small ways with great love. That's how the kingdom of God is built—one kind, loving act of service at a time.

When I'm running for my life, panicking, and feeling the world is going to hell in a handbasket, I'm grateful for the "Habakkuks" in my life who stand by the roadside holding up a sign saying, "This too will pass. Let your light shine. God's plan for peace is at hand."

*~Fr. Phil*