

**October 6, 2019 The Power of Faith Homily:** In covering the final day of a murder trial in Dallas, the mainstream and cable news reporters were witness to two extraordinary gestures of forgiveness, reconciliation and mercy. Following the conviction of a Dallas policewoman for murdering an unarmed man of color in his own apartment, and for which she received a ten year prison sentence, the brother of the slain man made a unheard of request of the presiding judge. He asked the judge's permission to embrace the woman who murdered her brother. The judge granted him permission. Turning to the police officer, he said, "If you are truly sorry--- I know I speak only for myself—I forgive you". He then left the witness stand and approached the officer. The two of them embraced. The officer was in tears. Perhaps even more startling was the reaction of the presiding judge. She left the bench and handed her own personal bible to the convicted felon. And she embraced her as well. One of the cable news commentators admitted that she shed a tear after seeing the drama unfold in court.

Outside the courthouse protestors demanded the maximum penalty for the crime. One placard read, "No mercy".

How do we account for the brother's remarkable gesture? The brother, a devout Christian, said, "As a Christian I am obliged to forgive my brother's assailant."

Today's gospel reading is taken from the seventeenth chapter of St. Luke's gospel, verses 6-10. The chapter begins with Christ forewarning his disciples of the inevitability of scandal in the church. And then he instructs them, "If your brother wrongs you reprove him, and if he repents, forgive him. Even if he wrongs you seven times in a day and comes back to you seven times, saying 'I am sorry', you are to forgive him". (Lk.17:4-5) It is then that the apostles make an appeal to the Lord: "Increase our faith". (Lk.17:5) Faith here means a strong and unshakeable trust in God and his revealed word. The disciples pray that the Lord take possession of them. Once again, Jesus speaks of the personal cost of following him. He sets a high bar. His standards are, to say the least, challenging.

Jesus speaks boldly about the power of faith. "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you" (Lk.17:6). In the miniscule size of a mustard seed faith can move mountains. Even the smallest amount of faith can achieve what is humanly impossible. It can transplant a tree with its deep roots in the sea. Jesus gives us the power to endure whatever may come. Recall the words of St. Paul: "I can do all things in him who strengthens me".(Phil.4:13)

One of the great figures of the Sixteenth Century is St. Thomas More. A one-time chancellor and close advisor to King Henry the Eighth, More was arrested for opposing the king's decision to enter into an invalid marriage. He was incarcerated in the Tower of London, and later beheaded. Awaiting his fate in his cell, he penned a letter to his learned daughter, Margaret, in which he stated his fear that his faith may weaken in his time of tribulation, and that he may be tempted to renounce his Catholic faith in order to save his life. He remained faithful to the end of his life. He died a martyr. The faith of great men and women is not so much something they possess as it is something that possesses them.

Clearly, faith has visibly waned in our secular culture. Fewer baptized Christians practice the faith. Mass attendance continues to decline. The respect for life, particularly pre-born human life, is largely ignored.

Ominous signs, to be sure. But in hand to hand combat with the forces of evil, Christ is the one who, in the end, prevails! All things are possible to the one who believes. In his Letter to the Romans, St. Paul writes, "The just man lives by faith".

Lord, increase our faith! Help us follow the example of a brave young man who witnessed to his Christian faith in a Texas court house. Make us the channels of your peace.

Amen!