

19 PENTECOST (LECTIONARY 27) OCTOBER 3, 2010 CYCLE "C"

TITLE: THE RIGHTEOUS LIVE BY FAITH

READINGS: Hab.1:1-4; 2:1-4, Ps. 37:1-9, 2Tim. 1:1-14, Luke 17:5-10

The other day I saw one of the national newscast's results of one of their poles. It seems that people of the United States get very low marks when it comes to knowing their religion. Evidently their pole, and you know how extremely accurate they are, told us that the Atheists and Agnostics come in first in knowing their "religion", Muslims are next followed by the Mormons and bringing up the rear were Christians. One commentator made the remark that Christians believe in Jesus but they don't seem to know him very well. Another said Christians believe the Bible is God's word and a sacred book, but don't seem to read it much. But that's not unusual for you can certainly have a very gifted mind in one area and be ignorant in other areas. Yes, we should be knowledgeable about our religion and our beliefs, but religion is not a contest or a matter of testing one's knowledge nor is it a recitation of creeds and rules. Some of our holiest and greatest saints, some who were extremely close to God, were pretty dumb. The bottom line is faith! Just as our readings put it today, "The righteous live by faith." Lord, I may be pretty ignorant when it comes to theology, and there is so much I need to learn from your Word, but I believe and I know that I am saved and will live in your glory forever because I have faith!

I am convinced that those who lead and guide us, those who profess to be pastors and shepherds of God's people certainly should be knowledgeable in their field. Not to be comfortable in your chosen profession can be more of a detriment than a benefit. You certainly wouldn't want to go to a doctor of medicine or a dentist an ophthalmologist or a teacher, engineer or contractor, for that matter, who didn't know his or her area of expertise. I know that people have been misinformed, misguided, misdirected and received wrong information from some who have been in positions of leadership, but lacking in knowledge of his/her field. The ministry has been and still is a field where ill or unprepared people have been given leadership positions. Proper schooling, study and seminary preparation, I feel, is essential to becoming an effective and proper pastor. Memorizing Scripture and lots of emotional and enthusiastic preaching no matter how well intentioned, a good pastor does not make!

But being very knowledgeable in your religion is not absolutely required to be a good Christian. Faith, on the other hand, is! Look at just a few examples from God's Word. When the Centurion asked Jesus to come and heal his servant and professed his belief, Matthew tells us, "When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, 'Truly I tell you, in no one, in Israel have I found such faith.'" Matt.8:10. Or again the blind man who said to him, "My Teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well.'" Mk.10:52. In Luke where they brought him a paralyzed man and it says, "When he saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven you.'" Lk.5:20. When they brought the paralyzed beggar to Peter and John in the temple, Peter said to him, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." Then Peter witnessed the man's and his own faith in Jesus when he said, "And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you." Acts 3,6,16. Over and over again throughout Scripture it is made very clear that faith is the requirement for our Christian religion.

Six hundred years before Christ Habakkuk set down a lasting truth when he said, "But the righteous live by their faith." Hab.1:4b. In Paul's second letter to Timothy we read, "I am reminded of your sincere faith a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure lives in you." 2Tim.1:5. And in our Gospel today we see, "The Apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!' the Lord replied, 'If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.'" Lk.17:5-6. Faith is the bottom line, it is the foundation stone which is essential, not necessarily knowing a great deal of facts, for you certainly can be ill-informed, but filled with faith and therefore with righteousness.

It was Luther and the other reformers who fought so hard against works and so assiduously for salvation through the free gift of God's grace through faith. Sola fide! Sola fide! They would cry. Faith alone! Faith alone! The pollsters and journalists can say what they want and criticize us concerning our lack of information about our religion, but we know what our Lord requires of us. It is faith in him. Just as Peter confessed when Jesus took his disciples to the district of Caesarea Philippi and said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" It was then that Simon Peter confessed his faith and answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God'" Matt.16:15-16. We may be short on theology and we may not know your Word as well as we should, but we do know, O Father, and confess that you so loved the world that you

give your only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

One day the great Michelangelo attracted a crowd of spectators as he worked. One child in particular was fascinated by the sight of chips flying and the sound of mallet on chisel. The master was shaping a large block of white marble. Unable to contain her curiosity, the little girl inquired, "What are you making?" He replied, "There is an angel in there and I must set it free." There is faith in your heart, set it free! **Amen.**

Pastor Barney