

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Luke 17: 5-10

Submitted by Dr. Rosemary Murphy

A recent news report presented a dramatic story of two brothers on the banks of a creek throwing sticks into its rushing water. The younger and smaller brother was about to throw a stick, lost his balance, and fell into the water. He was quickly carried downstream by its rapid flow. Remarkably, the older brother was able to run along the bank to the point where current slowed. He was able to go into water, grab his brother, carry him to the bank, and administer CPR. In a TV interview the older brother told the reporter that he did not consider himself a hero. “Well,” he said somewhat awkwardly, “he *is* my brother and I just did what I learned to do in scouts.” Perhaps, the older brother’s comment might be the whole point of today’s Gospel from Luke.

Jesus, present with his disciples, is asked, “Increase our faith.” (17:5) In other words the disciples are looking for Jesus to add to or give them more faith. However, using the images of the mustard seed and the mulberry tree, Jesus responds that faith is not about amount or size. It is about quality.

From this Gospel, faith may be described as an internal attitude that begins with God and grows or increases with nurturing and cultivation through a disciple’s faithful service. To make that point Jesus again uses one of his favorite household analogies, the master/servant relationship.

The servant in the story does exactly what he is expected to do: put on an apron, prepare something for the master to eat, and serve the meal. Once the master finishes his meal, as was the practice in the household, the servant will eat. The servant willingly did what he was called and trained to do and did not look for “thanks” for doing what the master expected.

Jesus’ message is that God does not “add to” our faith but calls us to nurture it by what disciples do, faithfully serve the God who created them. Disciples are to be “unprofitable servants” and serve others without self-congratulation, the need for recognition or gratitude. Most of the time their service will go unnoticed. The young man in the TV interview nailed it, when it comes to our brothers and sisters in Christ, we have to be there for them, doing what we are called to do.