

CS Prop22C St. Ann's07

In the Name of the One, Holy and undivided Trinity.

Lord, increase our faith.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of Mother Teresa's death. And with the anniversary there has been a good deal of coverage by the media focusing particularly on some of her confidential correspondence which has been made public. In one letter she expresses her pain because of what she perceives to be God's absence in spite of her intense desire for him. She says: "The silence and the emptiness is so great that I look and do not see – Listen and do not hear, - My tongue moves, but I do not pray".

For many around the world who looked up to Mother Teresa as a model of unquestioning faith, this revelation of her spiritual life has been shocking, even disillusioning. The media reports refer to her "crisis of faith". Perhaps that is accurate, if crisis means crossroad, as it does. Perhaps Teresa arrived at a crossroad in her faith where, as at all crossroads, she had to choose a direction: She could either abandon her faith altogether or she could go on, trusting God, despite God's utter silence and apparent absence. She chose the latter – to carry on.

The news reports that Teresa pleaded with her confidant to: "Pray for me that I may give him a free hand." Her prayer is not unlike that of the apostles: "Lord, increase our faith." - help us to trust God implicitly.

It is neither surprising or shocking that Teresa experienced this crisis. Day after day she worked tirelessly and prayed constantly for life for the dying and relief for the suffering with few, if any, observable results.

It is not surprising or shocking if we also sometimes question our own faith as we confront the horrors of the world in the daily news. Or as we make our way in an increasingly atheist society.

We live in a world in which most people think that reality is limited to only what can be seen, touched, heard, measured and tested by scientific method. What is, is. And what isn't, or what ceases to be, isn't. Life is life and when it is over, That's it. In that world view, based on scientific evidence, there is no place for the conviction that reality includes anything more than what meets the eye, that the world, as we know it, is not all there is and that the world is not only what it appears to be. In this world view the universe has come into being by chance and has no purpose. By the same token, human life has no purpose, either, beyond what is immediate. And so the goal in life is to enjoy it to the extent possible, and to get as much out of it as time and circumstances allow.

Those of us who stand every Sunday morning and recite, "I believe in God, creator of all there is seen and unseen", share a different world view, which along with our faith is challenged by our evidence-oriented opponents. Our faith, they say, is evidence of a failure of intelligence. We are considered unreasonable, out of touch, old fashioned, naïve, and a bit quaint, but, probably not dangerous. One professor of chemistry has said, that in the absence of evidence, the only reason to suppose that the universe (and incidentally human life) has any purpose is sentimental, wishful thinking and sentimental wishful thinking, which underlies all religion, is an unreliable tool for the discovery of the truth." Sometimes we are challenged directly. A friend of mine thought it was important to inform me recently that: "nobody who **thinks** can really believe that." By "that" he meant what you read in the Bible or say in Church. On a grander scale, the German philosopher Frederich Wilhelm Nietzsche once wrote: "Christians are pitiable not only because they live by faith rather than by evidence, but because the faith they declare has so thoroughly been demolished by the evidence." We are stymied in trying to defend our position in the face of such statements since all we have to fall back on is what we believe. Faith that is subject to proof is, by definition, not faith. We find ourselves feeling awkward, inarticulate and quite

foolish. Sometimes, I think it is very difficult for us not to wonder if they are not right, after all.

Perhaps an even greater obstacle to our faith than Nietzsche's currently prevailing, evidence-oriented world view, comes from the pages of the morning paper or the television news of the day. There we are confronted with the undeniably horrible reality of suffering and pain, violence, injustice, corruption. The television brings right into our living rooms - emaciated children begging for food. The hardened feet of refugees from war and oppression stumble right through our family rooms. The wounded and diseased are present there in the den in living color. We watch and we can't help but wonder if this is all there is. In the midst of tsunamis and floods, we also may well ask, where is God? Why is God silent? How can a good God allow such dreadful suffering among the innocent? Why doesn't God DO something. And finally, - - - Is there really a God? The same questions were on the lips of the prophet Habakkuk. "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrongs and look upon trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law is slacked and justice goes never forth. For the wicked surround the righteous, so justice goes forth perverted."

And the answer comes back from God – "I am here, even in the midst of apparent disaster, I am working to bring into reality my vision for a different kind of world; out of suffering will come new life, and new hope.

As Christians we have been grasped by and are invested in God's vision of a world dominated by peace and joy, reconciliation and freedom; a world where life, with all its delights, is abundant, and where all people live with mutual respect for one another and in harmony with all the creatures of God. The word that comes to us today is that the world is not spinning out of God's control and that God is at work even now to make that glorious vision a reality. Not just for us in that realm will shall

enter sometime after we die. No! Not at all. The vision is for this world as it will be when God's Kingdom comes, when God's love is sovereign on earth as it is in heaven. Our guarantee is in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who, as he hung on the cross so deeply felt God's absence. But, the resurrection assures us that God was present even in the midst of that suffering to bring out of it new life and new hope – not only for Jesus, but for the world.

However, it will take time and we must wait, trusting God, clinging to that vision and all that it promises. For in the vision lies our hope without which life is significantly diminished and in it we find meaning and purpose for the universe and for our lives.

There's an old saying that we should live every day as if it were our last. But I say to you, we should live every day as if we were going to live forever because we live, not just for today and as though it didn't matter. Our lives are part of God's great vision. Our lives have meaning in as much as we are part of God's plan for the final establishment of his purpose and so, everything we do matters. We live not just for ourselves, we live for God who is forever.

The Bible tells us that the prophet Jeremiah, just when the world, and his own life, appeared to be on the verge of collapse, went out and bought a plot of land. That is faith. A few weeks ago, Anne Talbott, knowing she would not see the results, ordered a field's worth of daffodils. That is faith. Mother Teresa, despite discouragement and longing carried on day after day loving the unlovable, giving dignity to the undignified and praying that God would increase her faith.

Lord, increase our faith.  
May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing through the power of the Holy Spirit.

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The Rev. Patricia Davidson

