

The precious stone

“The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith!’” (Lk. 17:5-6)

There was a wise woman who once saw a very beautiful stone and picked it up from the riverbank. The next day, she ran into a traveler who was very hungry and asked for food from her. The woman willingly shared her one loaf of bread with him. At the end, when she was putting the rest of the bread in her bag the traveler noticed the expensive stone and asked her to give it to him. The woman gave the expensive stone to the stranger without any hesitation. The traveler took the stone and left. He was very surprised because he did not expect that much sincerity from a stranger. He knew that the stone would bring enough money to live for many years and he would have a peaceful life. However, a few days later, this man came back and was very eager to find that woman. As he ran into the woman whom he was looking for, he handed back the expensive stone and said, “Please take your stone back. I know it is worth a lot of money, but I return this to you, anticipating an even more precious thing from you. Teach me what drove you to give that precious stone to a stranger without hesitation?”

In today’s Gospel reading, we read that the Apostles came to Jesus and asked him to increase their faith. For about two years, the Apostles witnessed many miracles and heard Christ’s teachings. However, witnessing and being taught by Christ were not enough for the Apostles to grow in their faith, because it needs to be practiced. After realizing that their faith was incomplete, they came back to Jesus and asked Him to increase a vital missing aspect of their faith. Likewise, in today’s story, a stranger was given an expensive stone, and for some time, he was content with that. However, after a short period of time, he realized that something was missing as well. He understood that there was something else which was more expensive than the stone itself. Upon that realization, he came back to the woman and asked her to teach him the hidden and missing aspect of faith.

In today’s Gospel reading and illustration, we notice one common theme. They all wanted to change their lives. Apostles wanted to increase their faith because they were not happy with the faith they possessed. Similarly, the stranger wanted to change the course of his life. He wanted to learn that aspect of faith which drove the woman to give the precious stone without hesitation. What is that priceless part of our faith which we all lack as well? I believe that precious thing

is unconditional willingness to serve God, to bring our humble and sincere service to God. The Apostles lacked this depth of faith so also the stranger and for this reason they returned. As soon as the Apostles received the Holy Spirit, they never lacked that willingness to serve God, and the proof is the fact that some of them became martyrs. The stranger came back with an increased faith and left having his faith completed.

Today, I wonder if many of us came to church because we lack that part of the faith within us as well. And I wonder we keep coming back because unconditional willingness is an ongoing process and needs to be replenished and refreshed with our confessions, with our pure prayers and with the help of Holy Communion. I am sure we all have trials, tribulations, unanswered prayers and many questions in our minds for many months and years which have no definite answers. Many of us face challenges every day, and we sometimes have no solutions to those challenges. However, today, just like the Apostles and the stranger, we return to God and ask Him, "Increase our faith, teach us how to willingly admit and face all the tribulations of this life as you willingly did by walking towards Golgotha and bearing all kinds of sufferings."

As the Apostle Paul instructs, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." (2 Tim. 2:15) Today, we came to present ourselves to God and communicate our precious wishes to God and ask him to make them real. We convey our heartfelt prayers and ask him to answer our prayers. Today, we admit our painful suffering and ask God to comfort us. We confess our tribulations and ask God to take care of them. Today, we express our grief to God and ask Him to console us. We proclaim our joy and ask Him to multiply it and make us fruitful servants. We bring our precious gifts, our time, talents and life and ask God to make them as pure as He wants. Today we came to church with many precious stones and in exchange we ask God to make those stones beyond price. Amen.