

Dear Brothers and Sisters



"Increase our faith!" This request, made by the apostles, is an act of humility: it is not easy to admit that one's faith needs increasing. Much easier to presume that one's faith is sufficient. Yet, as humble as the request appears, it also belies a hidden fact, namely that the disciples presume that they already have faith. They do not say 'Give us faith,' but 'Increase our faith.'

"If you had 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."

A strange answer from Jesus, but very specific. Mustard seeds are tiny, like pin heads, hardly visible at all. And yet faith even in this apparently small measure is enough. Faith is there or it isn't, it's not a matter of how much. It's not a just a matter of increasing one's faith; it's a matter of actually having it. If faith is present a mulberry tree could be uprooted by command and planted in the sea.

The mulberry tree. Not an oak, chestnut or maple. A mulberry! Jesus' use of this tree in his example has been interpreted in different ways by the Fathers of the Church. St. Ambrose says the mulberry tree represents the devil, because at first it is white, when the tree flowers, but reddens when the fruit forms, and finally turns black. Just as the devil, losing the white flower of his angelic nature is cast down to the darkness of sin. There is a different interpretation by St. Augustine, who commented that the mulberry tree is Christ's Cross. The Venerable Bede agrees, noting that mulberry leaves thrown onto a serpent kill it, and mulberries produce a liquid that resembles blood; hence the mulberry tree signifies the cross, and its fruit is Christ Himself, reddened on that tree by his own blood.

This mulberry tree, through faith, can be uprooted and planted in the sea. 'The sea' undoubtedly refers to the Dead Sea – that sea which is called dead because, being so salty, nothing can grow in it. It has no fish, no plants, and no fauna. It is dead. All of us have experienced the Dead Sea, a situation in life where it seems impossible that anything can take root and grow.

But in the midst of death life appears. The cross is the instrument of this life. For those who have faith the cross is a means to experience life even in the midst of death. Faith, nourished by the Word and the Sacraments, is able to cast out the devil and enlighten the cross of Christ as something glorious, something life-giving.

Do you have faith? How much? How can you tell? How is faith quantified?

Faith, says St. Paul, comes from listening to the Word of God.

This Word is transmitted to us in the Sacraments, through Scripture, through other people of faith, and through the events of life.

Fr. Sean