

27th Sunday Ordinary Time Year "C" *Usquequo, Domine, clamabo, et non exaudis?*
October 1-2, 2016
Readings: Habakkuk 1:2-3; 2:2-4; 2 Tim. 1:6-14; Luke 17:5-10

"How long, O LORD? I cry for help, but you do not listen!" When these words were uttered, political intrigue and idolatry were widespread in Israel. It was around 600 B.C. and soon thereafter, Jerusalem would be captured and the people sent into their Babylonian exile. Clearly, Habakkuk sensed something was about to happen, and he sounded the alarm. But there was a difference.

Rather than sound the alarm with the people, he sounded the alarm with God himself. The situation of Judah was desperate and so was Habakkuk. For what may be the first time in Israelite literature, a man questions the very ways of God. He is annoyed at God for holding back punishment upon the wrongdoers. What about now?

Today, many Catholics are frustrated with the state of our nation and world, and question God's response to it. Today is Respect Life Sunday, covering a wide range of issues. Too often I think of all the things I did not accomplish during the day defend the dignity of human life. I think of the continued scourge of abortion and wonder what more could I be doing? Even though the number has diminished in the U.S., still over 1,000,000 million abortions are performed annually. "How long, O Lord?"

The theme this year for this month is "Moved by Mercy," and I can positively say that the Year of Mercy has borne great fruit in people seeking God's mercy, and that God's tender mercy certainly goes out to those who have made tragic choices in their lives, including the choice to seek an abortion. If you know someone hurting, assure them of God's unconditional love and encourage them to seek healing and peace. Explain how the Church's Rachel's Vineyard retreats for post-abortion healing can help.

As Cardinal Dolan wrote in this year's Respect Life message:

From each tiny child waiting to be born, to individuals nearing death, all are precious and deserve our care and protection. Women and men suffering after abortion, individuals tempted to end their lives, couples longing to conceive a child, people pushed to the margins of society by a 'throwaway culture,' expectant mothers facing challenging pregnancies, and every other person—each “has a place in God's heart from all eternity.”¹

We must never, ever tire of proclaiming God's mercy, just as we must never grow weary of witnessing to the sanctity of human life, even if it is unpopular or uncomfortable. While intellectually we may know that it is wrong to be frustrated with God, sometimes we do not know where else to turn. In these cases, is it wrong to lash out in frustration? Was Habakkuk sinning? I humbly respond by saying, “No.” He was crying out to the Lord in his need, his frustration, his anger and his exasperation. At least he was crying out; he had not given up. And neither ought we.

It reminded of one of the stories of the desert fathers in the early church. One of the brothers approached the Abbot complaining that another brother had insulted him, saying: “I am set to revenge myself, Father.” The abbot began to entreat him to leave vengeance to God. But he said, “I shall not rest till I stoutly avenge myself.” So the abbot said, “Since you have made up your mind once for all, now let us pray.” Rising, the abbot began to pray in these words: “God, You are no longer necessary to us that You need be anxious for us: for we ourselves, as this brother has said, are able to avenge ourselves.” The brother promised that he would contend no more with the man with whom he was angry.

¹ “Moved by Mercy,” Respect Life Message 2016, Cardinal Timothy Dolan. Additional quotation from *Amoris Laetitia*, #168.

Like Habakkuk, we await the workings of the Lord, yet sometimes feeling as though nothing is happening. We wait, even as doctors continue to manipulate human genetic material in the form of embryonic stem-cell research. We await the Lord even as sincere couples struggling with infertility may not be aware that *in vitro* fertilization brings about the deliberate destruction of embryos that doctors do not deem to be of the highest quality. Clinics boost their reported success rates, but they do so by transferring two or more embryos per cycle to attempt one live birth.²

Increasingly of late, some people are clamoring for the death penalty, even as we read stories of death row convicts having being freed from prison due to DNA testing that has exonerated them for capital crimes alleged years earlier. Last year, 48% of those who died under Oregon's assisted suicide law cited as their reason, that they were being a "burden" on family, friends, or caregivers. Really? A burden on their families? I could list many more examples.

In spite of all this, we must never lose hope and we must never grow weary. God permits evil to happen, because He gave us free will. In dealing with the question of evil and free will St. Augustine pointed out that "God judged it better to bring good out of evil than to suffer no evil to exist."³

No, God has not abandoned us in the struggle for good. And while twenty-six centuries separate us from Habakkuk, we feel a kindred spirit. But vengeance is not ours. Our work is not yet done and God will give us the strength to carry on. Even in our struggle, God and God alone is in charge.

² In Vitro Fertilization: The Human Cost, USCCB Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities July 2015

³ St. Augustine., Enchirid., xxvii