

Barbara, a merciful Sister and compassionate Sister of St. Francis – was sitting by her second floor convent window one evening, opening her mail.

She received a letter from home – and her loving parents included a \$100 bill – even though they had been told many times over the years their daughter could not keep the money – but had to turn it in to her superior.

But just as she finished reading the letter – she glanced out the window and saw a rather poorly dressed man down on the street – leaning on the lamppost – he certainly looked like he needed the money more than the Franciscan sisters did – and after all, the sister’s ministry was to help the poor.

So Sister Barbara quickly took a pad a paper, wrote a note saying: “Don’t Despair” and signed her name to it. She wrapped the \$100 bill in the note – and threw it down to the man – the note landing at his feet.

He picked it up, read it – looked up at the window and gave a thumbs up -- and quickly walked away.

The next day, Sister Barbara was told there was a man at the door of the convent wanting to see her.

When she went to the door – there was the same man waiting for her. Without a word – he handed her a stack of \$100 bills.

“What’s this?”, Sister Barbara asked.

“That’s the \$8,000 you have coming to you Sister,” he replied. “Don’t Despair --- won the 4<sup>th</sup> race – and paid 80 to 1!!!!”

DON’T DESPAIR seems to be the theme of today’s readings.

We can certainly hear despair in the first reading from Habakkuk – as the prophet prays: “How long, O Lord!? I cry for help but you do not listen!”

Habakkuk is having quite a struggle with God – and perhaps we can relate with him. . . He goes on for several verses telling God about all the things that are happening to the Jewish people.

Not only were the Babylonians defeating every nation from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea -- - but God’s own people in Judea and Jerusalem had turned from their worship of God to idolatry,

And showed total disregard to the poor and the disadvantaged ---

--all part of that loss of focus we heard about a couple of weeks ago with the prophet Amos– and consistently hear about in the prophets -- when the Israelites lose all sense of humility – and become proud – thinking of themselves as owners, permanent possessors in their own right – rather than stewards: temporary gift-holders from God.

And so Habakkuk exclaims: “I cry out to you, ‘violence!’ but you do not listen and do not intervene. Why, Lord? Why?”

God’s answer is (as it always is) – “trust me, have faith, be patient.” God’s salvation will come when God thinks the time is right. God will not disappoint. Writing all of this down on tablets of stone or clay, would symbolize permanence to this promise. Those struggling with faith need this reassurance for “The just one, because of faith, shall live.” St. Paul will quote this line twice in his letters and it applies to faith in Christ Jesus (Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11). Despair won’t help anyone – only faith.

It took many years until “in the fullness of time” God himself appeared as our Savior – not just for the Jewish people – but for all people. He began his saving work when he came to live among us – but he has not finished that work yet. So we continue to need faith until God’s kingdom of eternal peace has been fully established. The apostles did have a sense that what Jesus was asking of them would require a lot of faith – and that’s why we hear them in the Gospel asking for an increase of faith. . .

It’s interesting the way Jesus responds. It’s like he’s telling them, “Duh! What do you think I’ve been trying to do for you here – ever since I called you to be my followers! I’ve been trying to increase your faith!”

So he tells them, “even with a tiny bit of faith, faith the size of a mustard seed --- you can do unbelievable things.”

But much like the Israelites before them – the Apostles so easily get distracted by the things of this world – lose sight of Jesus – and so quickly get lost and afraid.

What are they to do – and what are we to do?

I think one answer comes at the end of the today’s Gospel: “when you have done all you have been commanded” – indicates we know God is in charge, we are not – so it is a lesson in humility – and a lesson in faith:

the only way we can increase our faith – is to live our faith. . . so we take time – make the time – to pray, read the Scriptures, come to Mass, keep our possessions in a proper perspective: we trust, have faith, and be patient.

If we don’t live our faith – then it will be like muscles we don’t use – they get weaker, rather than stronger.

Another thing we can do is what we hear in today’s second reading: “Take as your norm (that is our practice) the sound words that you heard from me.”

Words are so important – especially the things we tell ourselves – those tapes that keep playing over and over again in our minds and hearts. A whole area of counseling has developed around the idea of how what we tell ourselves can and does affect us.

And what we tell ourselves also affects our faith. If we always tell ourselves negative things such as “God doesn’t really love me – God is too busy to worry about me. God doesn’t hear my prayers; God isn’t here when I come to Church. God really has it in for me,” we are going to start believing these things – and live our lives accordingly.

So we need to take as our norm, our practice, the sound words we have heard from Paul and the other writers of the Scriptures:

“God does love me. God never gives up on me no matter what. Christ died for me. Christ hears me when I pray, even when he answers by saying ‘no’. Christ truly comes to me in the Eucharist. Christ walks with me on my journey through life.”

Telling ourselves these things – especially when we don’t feel like it – or when the world is whispering doubts in our ears – or more enticing messages to us – can and will increase our faith – and remember, with faith the size of a mustard seed – we can do amazing things.