

The Mustard Seed of Man's Work & the Mountains of Grace

Gospel: Matthew 17:14-23: *And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a [certain] man, kneeling down to him, and saying, Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oftimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him. Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me. And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour. Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.*

And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry.

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ye shall say unto this mountain,
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and nothing shall be impossible unto you."

It seems that the event of exorcism that we heard in today's Gospel passage was a criterion for having

either a weak or deep faith. The Lord Jesus expresses dissatisfaction with the disciples, relating their weakness to faithlessness. He calls this generation, "faithless and perverse." The faith rebuked by Christ is unable to solve spiritual questions and problems, including physical infirmities. Such faith does not satisfy Christ and does not care for human needs. It does not answer man's inquiries, thus leaving him or her helpless. This passage uses some tough expressions, and it leads us to the question, "What is a true faith, not in the sense that we, a faithless generation, know it, but as Christ defines it?"

Jesus' comparison between the mustard seed (the measure of faith) and the mountains (the works) expresses a deep truth and reveals to us the nature of faith meant by Christ. If we have faith as small as a grain of mustard seed, we would have achieved works as big as mountains.

The mustard seed represents the size of what we can offer, and the mountains represent the size of works brought about by the Lord. The former points to our weaknesses and the latter reminds us of the work of His grace in us. The faith requested from us by Christ is one based on the work of the Lord in us. When St. Paul asked the Lord to take away from him his "thorn in the flesh" (1Cor. 12:6), the Lord answered him by saying, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (1Cor. 12:9). So, true faith is to believe that the grace of our Lord works in us, even if we had "faith" and offered a desire as big as a mustard seed. Faith is not then a principle or a doctrine as much as a belief in the person of Jesus Christ. Such faith is similar to that of Paul who said that he could do everything in Christ who strengthens him. Lastly, faith is, in a word,

equal to cleaving to the Lord and putting all our hope in Him.

A twisted or untrue faith is to believe in certain convictions or in oneself. This is ineffective and does not fulfill human needs for life. True faith knows that God fulfills everything, and "without him we cannot do anything." True faith knows well that we, as humans, are weak, but as faithful we are strong. According to the Apostle Paul, we are either vessels of honor or of disgrace. Man can be a vessel of honor when he/she is "the Temple of the Holy Spirit." He can be a vessel of shame and disgrace if he/she is empty of grace. Man is distinguished from all the other created beings in that he is the only created being who has the possibility of receiving the waves of Divine Grace. Only he is able to pray and talk to the Eternal One, and to walk by faith in Him. The righteous lives by faith. The uniqueness of man is that he is able to receive the pouring out of Divine Grace from above through his/her faith. Faith, even as big as a mustard seed, is the channel that picks up the waves of the Spirit who works in us for the good of our being.

"The one born of the flesh is flesh!" What can a living being do more than work for his daily living and make ends meet? Living beings are born and die in a closed circle and for a limited time. Even man when he is just at that level, that is, occupied with daily affairs of the world, would be no more than living in this closed circle. He can improve his civilizations and upgrade his daily life. These are all from flesh and to flesh, and they all return to dust. Man fulfills himself and his human truth, giving it what it is worth, when he lifts up his heart and hands to heaven and becomes a channel of Divine Grace.

A worldly affair having the size of a mustard seed can only yield a similar size of outcome. The size of a mustard seed of faith can however move mountains, since the divine grace works through this faith.

Finally, a just man will not move mountains unless he is an ambassador of Christ in the world. He enters the world not in his own name but in the name of his Master through whom he can do everything. It is the same with an ambassador in any country. Man does not reach his perfection unless he keeps the loftiness of this message. Whoever takes upon himself this message by faith, grace will overpower him and the Lord will strengthen his steps. Man becomes a noble medium of the Divine, a light to the world and a mustard seed moving mountains. A faithful man becomes an effective hand working for God who needs mustard seeds drawing the Divine Grace to the thirsty world. The faithful man is the one who cries with St. Paul at every moment, saying that we were not given the spirit of failure, but the Spirit of the Son who fulfills everything in us. We give Him offerings as small as a mustard seed and He gives us works as great as mountains.

Amen.