

Growing up my parents had a small farm and even though working on the farm wasn't their main income, we still put many hours into working the fields and vineyard. One day I remember I went with dad to collect the hay that was still in the field. We drove our little tractor out and piled all the hay on the wagon behind. As we were finishing up the sky got all of the sudden really dark as the huge storm clouds were rolling in. Now to better understand, before you're ready to collect all the dry hay from the fields to store it in your barn, it's a long process and you put a lot of work into it. You have to first cut the grass, then you go couple times to turn it over while it's drying and then you go to collect it to store it in a dry place. Now if it storms in between, the process of drying starts over and if you get hit by couple storms in the row, there is a good chance that you might lose all the hay.

But anyways, our hay was already on the wagon of the tractor as the clouds were rolling in. And I could see my dad getting worried. Can we make it home before the rain? The field was about 10 minutes away from the barn. I know that there aren't many storms here but if you experienced a good storm you know what it's like. As the clouds roll in everything gets darker and you know it's about to start raining. And then everything gets absolutely still and you experience the quiet before the storm. It was this very quiet that we drove through as we had about five more minutes to get home. And my dad starts to complain: "Everything will go to waste, all this work for nothing." And I just kind of quietly sat praying, "Lord please help us to make it." And then after that quiet before the storm, the wind picks up and you know it's about to start. At this point the wind is blowing stronger and stronger, as we're approaching our barn. My dad says: "We're not going to make it; we're not going to make it." And I just keep praying, come on Lord, we're so close. And then you feel the first big drop hitting your face and you know this is it; we're only seconds from torrential down pour. We turned into our drive way and as the rain drops increase in their number we pulled into our barn, dad didn't even have the chance to turn off the tractor when the biggest rain hit the outside. I can see the huge relief on my dad's face as he looks at me with a smile. I looked at him and said: "Dad, you gotta have faith."

It was this story that my dad shared with everyone at the reception after my ordination he said how through this experience and my comment his faith was strengthened that day. And I

remembered this story as I read today's Gospel, which is once again—surprise surprise, not an easy one to hear. The apostles as they were heading to Jerusalem together with Jesus, ask him: *"Lord increase our faith."* And Jesus responds with the story of the mustard seed.

What do these words mean and how do they connect to our everyday faith lives? Well when we first read these words of Jesus, they sound rather harsh; right? They either portray the apostles as the ones with little faith. Or it's like the apostles are asking for their faith to be increased so they can do great things and be honored for it. And that's why Jesus says: *"It doesn't matter how much faith you have, even little faith can do great things."* But if we're all honest, we've all asked at some point the same thing: *"Lord, increase our faith."*

For the truth is, that we all struggle with faith, that's why it is called faith, we don't struggle with things we can touch and see, but it is the unknown that lies ahead of us that worries us. Whether it is the worry about hay getting all wet in the storm, or the question, "am I going to get cured?" It might be the unknown in our search for a job, or a concern about a certain decision we just made. Or maybe it is our struggle with the ultimate question, is there God and does he love me? There is an old saying in Slovak: "When the battle is over, everyone can be a general." But it is in the midst of that battle when we need the faith the most, when we fall on our knees and cry out to Jesus: *"Lord give us the strength and increase our faith."*

It is in the times like this that Jesus is closer to us than ever, in our struggle with fear, and even with doubt itself he says: *"Don't lose your faith, for I am with you always. And even a little trust in me, will be able to get you through the toughest times and will enable you to achieve great things."* For Christ through the gift of faith changes and transforms our lives, from lives that are all about us into lives that are all about God. In Hebrews 12 we read: *"Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking and keeping our eyes on Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith."* And I understand that this might not sound very appealing at first, for if we keep our eyes on Jesus, they can't be set on us, if we keep our eyes on Jesus, we realize that the point of our lives is to serve him, and that's something we'll always struggle with. But Jesus reminds us today that there isn't a greater thing here on earth than to be able to give our lives fully to him; to love him and serve him in complete obedience. **For that's what faith is about, that's how it gets strengthened and perfected, how it bears fruits and how we by God's grace through faith receive salvation and life.**

In Ephesians 2:8-9 we read: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast.”* Paul says in different words what Jesus tells his disciples. You have been saved, the price was paid, you don’t have to worry about the amount of your faith. That’s not what faith is about; your faith is a gift of salvation given to you through Jesus Christ.

See why Jesus might have been little bit frustrated with his disciples? They have been walking with him for so long, they experienced his healings and miracles and yet they worried about their faith. And so Jesus refocuses their attentions from a worry about their faith to a humble life of service. In the book *Where God meets Man* professor Forde emphasizes the gift of God’s grace and faith and he says that sometimes we’re so worried about our faith and climbing that latter up to heaven that we forget the fact that God has already come down to earth, that he sacrificed his life for us so that we don’t have to worry about salvation anymore. All we have to do is to repent and to accept it with grateful hearts and then put it to work serving the Lord and our neighbor.

But as we said, even though we know that our Lord is always with us, and that he loves us unconditionally... we STILL lose sight of this gift, sometimes we start doubting and it happens especially when our life becomes too busy to spend time with our Lord. It happens when our everyday business takes over our lives; it happens when we stop reading the Bible or can’t find the time to come to church.

If that’s the case, and you’ve been kind of struggling with your faith, and have been asking God to increase it, please give him chance to do so through the power of his word. Pick up a Bible, start reading a devotional, join a prayer group or a Bible study... come see me! I have lots of ideas for you! In any case my prayer for each of us this week is that the word of Christ will dwell in us richly as we continue our journeys of faith and may our faith be increased daily as we keep our eyes set on Jesus.

Amen