

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time - C

When I was a student at IU, my roommate was someone with whom I had a lot in common:

We both came from large blue-collar families, both had lived in small towns, and we both had attended Catholic school.

It was nice to have someone who had the same experience as I when it came to religion, even though neither of us were too good at getting to Mass at the time.

We were comfortable with having been raised Catholic, although what the future held was still a question mark.

The second year of our rooming together was when my conversion to a more active faith really started to take hold. Tom, my roommate, was not too happy to see that.

For him it almost came across as a betrayal of some unspoken agreement that we would be Catholic in our upbringing, but not in our practice. I was leaving him behind, and he didn't like that—not one bit.

He didn't want to see me getting all goody-two shoes about life and was quite frank in telling me so.

God would not be denied, however, and eventually Tom had to come to terms with the fact that his old

roommate was going to become a Franciscan and a priest!

He did come around, and was there when I was ordained. At that point he was even happy and proud of the fact.

The chain of events led one evening to a conversation where Tom admitted, in his words, that he had no faith.

I was supposed to respond. I can't remember what I said, but I do remember feeling like it was woefully inadequate.

If I were to get a second chance, I think today's gospel would be the place I would want to start.

The disciples' experience is that, when it comes to faith, theirs and that of Jesus seem to have next to nothing in common.

Jesus has a deep prayer life, preaches with authority, heals people, and on some occasions, even restores them to life.

The disciples worry—about not having enough food to give to the poor, about failing in proclaiming the good news, about trying to heal but having nothing happen.

Thus the request: "Increase our faith!"

Jesus' response is the shift the focus away from an apparent lack of faith to

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how much good even a little faith can do.

Even faith the size of a mustard seed has power!

To my old roommate who claimed to have no faith I would now respond by pointing out all the evidence from his life that indicates that faith is in fact present and alive.

For one, he's still alive. He still finds a reason to get up in the morning and put forth the effort to be productive.

A basic form of faith is required for us to do even that.

He has two children who have grown up well. They have good values, are committed to serving others, and generally look to the future with a sense that it will be worthwhile to experience it.

True, they are not too well schooled in matters of the Catholic religion, but faith does not begin there.

It begins in a deeper experience of the goodness of life and the fittingness of responding to it with an open heart.

When Jesus talks about faith the size of a mustard seed, I don't think he's thinking about how well the disciples knew the Scriptures—of course they could have done better at that—he's talking about a basic disposition that reaches deeper even than dogma.

Part of our job as Christians is to be in touch with this very basic level of faith, to nurture it with the practices of Catholicism and the doctrines of the church, and then to stand back and see what God will do with us!

Planting mulberry trees in the sea will not do anybody much good, but that image is a good one to stand for the fact that, willing to put into practice whatever faith we have, we will be amazed at what comes of it.

We will be humbled, too, that God would find so much good in such a little package, which is us.