27th Sunday in O.T. 2025

When Jesus ascended into heaven, the apostles were left in a bit of a quandary – they wondered, “What do we do now?” On reading the Gospels, one might get the impression that they immediately rushed out and began preaching. But it didn’t quite happen that way. Initially, they continued to think of themselves as observant Jews – it would take almost ten years before they realised that things had radically changed – they were now “Christians”. In those early years they spent a great deal of time reflecting on what Jesus had said and done. Then they began to write down his teachings, and their reflections on those teachings. Those writings we today refer to as the New Testament.

But there was still the question, “What does all this mean? What exactly is a Christian to believe?” Thus began a time of discussion, and argument, together with rows and misunderstandings. Amazingly, this process continued for over three hundred years – you see, the Church never rushes, but moves slowly, and gradually discerns the will of God. Truth, like a mustard seed, takes careful and patient tending, before it flowers into something majestic and beautiful!

In the year 325, the Church reached the stage when it was ready to determine and formulate its core beliefs. In that year, three hundred bishops, with about twelve hundred priests and deacons, gathered in council, in the city of Nicaea, which today is in modern Turkey. At the end of two months of deliberation, the they formulated and laid out clearly and succinctly the Church’s core beliefs. Seventeen hundred years later, Christians, East and West, Catholic and Protestant, still subscribe to this ancient statement of faith. We call it the Nicene Creed, and we recite it in every Sunday Mass.

It is suggested that familiarity can breed contempt! We are familiar with the Creed, and while we are certainly not contemptuous of it, it is possible to recite it, Sunday after Sunday, and fail to allow its majesty and beauty to touch our hearts, particularly should we view the Creed as merely a list of dusty doctrinal formulas. But in fact, it is our love song to the One who loved us first, God who is love. Love transforms the Creed from a series of abstract propositions and opens for us the doorway into the mystery of God’s love.

Each Sunday, as we recite the Creed, we are not reciting empty words but are lovingly proclaiming our faith in “God, the Father Almighty” who out of love created “all things visible and invisible”; and in Jesus Christ who for love of all humanity “and for our salvation came down from heaven”; “and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life” who pours divine love into the hearts of all believers.

We also proclaim belief “in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church”. This is a proclamation of belief in the Church, not as an institution, but as the people of God. In other words, God’s love for us, and our love for God, is always lived out in a social context – we love our neighbours as ourselves. The Creed, therefore, stands both as a challenge and as a proclamation - it states, in solemn and majestic words, that which the Eucharist makes a divine reality - a holy communion of love, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and neighbour.

Today, with the apostles, we ask Jesus, *“Increase our faith”.* This is a prayer, one we have all prayed at some time or other. But what were the apostles asking for? What do we seek when we ask for faith? The response of Jesus to the apostles’ request was quite extraordinary, he said, *“Were your faith the size of a mustard seed!* Jesus was telling them that they had already within them the potential and promise of faith. The apostles were confusing faith with knowledge – they wanted to have a greater understanding of God, and of God’s ways. We too tend to equate faith with greater knowledge and understanding. The prophet, Isaiah, once advised, *“Unless you believe, you will not understand” (Is.7:9).*

Just as a mustard seed can only flourish under the right conditions, so faith can only develop if we have a profound sense of God's love for us. This recognition leads us to return love for love. Then follows the hunger to know God more deeply, and to understand God more fully. This is reflected beautifully in human relationships: first you fall in love, then you desire to really know and to understand the beloved – but this takes time! On the journey of faith, seldom are there quick answers!

The novelist, Robert Bridges, once asked his friend, the Jesuit poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, how he could learn to believe. Bridges expected a philosophical answer, but Hopkins simply replied, “Give alms." He was saying to Bridges that God is to be experienced in the love of others. It is possible to get so entangled with intellectual difficulties, that we fail to look for God in very practical, everyday ways. The way of love is the pathway of faith! To this truth the Nicene Creed, has for centuries, eloquently borne witness.

*“Father,*

*with time and care*

*even a mustard seed can flourish.*

*Bring, to fruition, we pray,*

*the faith you have sown in our hearts,*

*and let its power be seen in our lives.”* **Amen.**