

Each one of you is important for our church  
Bishop Milan Lach, SJ, of Parma

Every day, we are tested in our faith. We need to decide whether we believe in God or whether we will rely on our own knowledge, decisions and solutions for our lives. In today's Gospel, Jesus Christ invites us to believe as the centurion believed.

At that time, Jews would not associate with pagans or enter into their houses. To do so would have made them impure and prohibited them from participating at synagogue. In the Gospel of Matthew, a Roman centurion — a pagan — goes to Jesus. And what does Jesus do? He speaks with the centurion. In speaking with a pagan and answering his petition, Jesus Christ shows that he is the Savior of all people everywhere in the world.

The centurion asks Jesus to heal his servant, who is ill in his house. He recognizes Jesus as Lord and does not expect Jesus to visit his home. Rather, he says: "Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed" (Mt 8:8).

Moved by the centurion's faith and humility, Jesus responds, "Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith" (Mt 8:10). Jesus uses these strong words to show us the faith of the centurion. We should ask ourselves, how is my faith? What does it mean to believe today? Every day, we are invited to renew our faith. It is not something that we do once and for all.

We come to church to be nourished in our decision to believe. We need each other as witnesses. I need to see your witness and you need to see my witness, and this is the reason for a congregation. Some people say that it is enough to pray at home. But then where are your witnesses?

We are called to be witnesses of faith, a light to be seen by all people. It is important for us to nourish our faith through prayer. Where? First, in church on Sunday, every Sunday, to pray together. The Divine Liturgy is the best prayer we know. Why? Because Jesus is here present in the Word of God and in the Body and Blood of Christ.

Parents, you must pray together with your children; try to find time for prayer. Families are the first church and you have a big obligation to give the faith to your kids.

I pray for you every Sunday. Please pray for me also. Pray for the church, that others will not be scandalized by our lack of faith. Pray for priestly vocations, that we will have priests and nuns for our church.

I grew up in a simple village and the faith of the community encouraged me to grow in faith. I saw the face of simple people, simple believers, every Sunday in church, and the congregation was for me the space to grow in my faith, after seeing the faith of my mom and dad.

Faith is a gift of God. So, if you received the faith from your parents, don't forget to pray for your parents and give thanks every day for their example to you. If you received your faith as an adult, give thanks to God.

And, at the end of the Divine Liturgy, go out in the world and proclaim that Jesus Christ is alive, that he is the unique truth for our life and the unique salvation of our souls, no one else.

Each one of you is very important for our church. This world needs your witness and, based on your witness, it will believe or not believe. So, let us pray together to follow Jesus and the promises of the Gospel for the coming of the heavenly kingdom.

*This article is based on the homily Bishop Lach gave at St. Athanasius the Great Parish in Indianapolis June 17.*

*As published in Horizons, July 8, 2017  
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