

Help Me Believe September 12, 2021

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.

In our Gospel reading today, we heard about a time when Jesus, along with Peter, James, and John, had just come down from the Mount of Transfiguration. It was there that His closest disciples had seen the impossible become possible when Jesus was transformed in all His Glory right before their very eyes. Then they saw Him speaking with Elijah and Moses. They heard the voice from the cloud say, ***"This is my beloved Son; listen to Him."*** While they had wanted to stay on that mountain top longer, they had to come back down to rejoin the other disciples who weren't so fortunate.

Because things hadn't gone very well, they were finding that the possible had become impossible. As they had done in the past, they tried healing a little boy who was afflicted by an unclean spirit only to find that they couldn't. And if that wasn't unsettling itself, the scribes who were there began to argue with them and a crowd gathered around them while they most likely were struggling with their own personal doubts and uncertainty.

By the way, did you know that when she was alive even Mother Teresa suffered from doubt and uncertainty? Many considered her to be full of faith because she ministered to the poorest of the poor in India. To them, she was a living example of how to live out a life of faith. So much so that it only took nine years after her death for the Roman Catholic

church to declare her a saint. But it wasn't until after her death that a book was published detailing some of the personal doubts and uncertainty that she experienced throughout her life. She wrote in her private letters to her confessor, *"Where is my faith? – even deep down, right in, there is nothing but emptiness and darkness. My God – how painful is this unknown pain. It pains without ceasing. – I have no faith. – I dare not utter the words and thoughts that crowd in my heart – and make me suffer untold agony. So many unanswered questions live within me – I am afraid to uncover them, because of the blasphemy...if there be God, - please forgive me."*

When Jesus came up and asked His disciples, ***"What are you arguing about with them?"*** They must've been glad to see Him. But before they could answer Him, the father of the little boy they tried to heal spoke up and shared that he had asked Jesus' disciples to cast out the demon, but they weren't able to. So Jesus said to them, ***"O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me."*** And as the little boy began to have another seizure, and after answering Jesus' question about how long this had been going on, the father pleaded, ***"If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."*** To which Jesus replied, ***"If you can! All things are possible for the One who believes."*** But then the father said something rather profound, ***"I believe; help my unbelief!"***

Because just like the disciples, Mother Teresa, many saints before us, and each of us, while we might not verbalize it, we have all had that same struggle. ***"I believe; help my unbelief."*** We believe in the impossible and yet, at times we can struggle to believe. Maybe that's true for you right now. While you've come because of your faith, you are dealing

with something that seems impossible. Maybe you've experienced something that you never expected to happen. Or maybe you expected things to get better, and they haven't. When doubt and uncertainty set in, it can be hard for us to believe and have faith.

I don't know if you ever heard this, but back in the late 18th century when Germany invaded Poland, many villages were burned down. And there's a story of one village that was so badly burned that nothing was left standing. And yet, when the sun came up the next morning, an old man pounded a few boards together to make a stand as if he was going to open up for business and sell something. As the old man stood behind the stand, a young man came by and looked at him in disbelief. He said to the old man, *"What are you selling in these ruins?"* And the old man, who smiled back, said, *"It might seem impossible, but I'm selling hope. If you can sell water in the desert, the place to sell hope is on the ash heap of destruction."*

You know, as impossible as it that might sound, there's some truth in that statement. Because God sent us His own Son, Jesus, to experience all our doubt and uncertainty. And while He compassionately commanded the mute and deaf spirit to come out of the young boy, Jesus Himself would pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, ***"Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."*** And yet it was on that ash heap of destruction, as Jesus hung on the cross for us, with all our sins of doubt and uncertainty, that He cried out, ***"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*** And yet, it is through His death and resurrection that the impossibility of doubt and uncertainty is replaced with the possibility of forgiveness and the Hope of new life.

You see, Jesus is the founder and perfecter of our faith. And having been baptized into His death and resurrection, we receive faith according to the measure God has given. We don't create it, but simply receive it and use it for His purposes. While some reject it, this precious gift given by God, without it and the power of the Holy Spirit working within us, we wouldn't believe at all. And yet, from time to time, God uses doubt and uncertainty to test our faith, that He might refine it and make it grow even stronger.

If you're experiencing doubt and uncertainty right now, here are three suggestions: 1) Like the saints before you, be honest and confess your doubt and uncertainty. 2) Be compassionate with yourself - as Jesus was with the little boy in our Gospel - and allow His Word to do its work within you. And finally, even though doubt and uncertainty might have you believing that no one will hear your prayers because you are already dead, 3) like the father of the little boy, keep on praying and asking for help. Be persistent in prayer. Say to Him, ***"I believe; help me with my unbelief."*** So that your prayers might be lifted up and receive an answer according to His will.

He makes the impossible, possible. Not only does He forgive us our sins, but He is also the One who gives to us the Hope of new life. So we can believe that its by grace that we are saved through faith given to us by God, that we might live with Him both now and always.

In Jesus' name, Amen.