

27C Homily – Deacon Steve Moses

“Stir into flame the gift of God that you have.”

This Bible passage is one I often used when I was the Director of Stewardship and Evangelization at Divine Mercy in Faribault.

I had it printed on coffee mugs and gave them away to those volunteering in shared ministry.

“Stir into flame the gift of God that you have.” I used this verse was at the bottom of all my emails and imprinted it on my stationary.

God gives us many gifts, and one of them is the gift of faith. It’s a gift to be cherished and a gift to be nourished and enriched.

I have always found it perplexing why one person believes in God, while another claims not to.

Both may be equally aware of the arguments for and against the existence of God.

Both live in the same world and see the same events.

And yet to one, the heavens declare the glory of God, in the firmament above she sees God’s handiwork, but for the other, the universe is a void.

Even when we believe there are times when God can seem distant, far from our lives.

This sense of the absence of God is a part of the Judeo-Christian experience; so much so that Jesus, dying on the cross, quotes Psalm 22:1 – "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

He seems to be asking; Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?

And yet there are times in our lives, when we instinctively sense on some level, that God is with us.

I would hope that most of us have experienced a sense of the wonder and the presence of God at one time or another.

I experienced the presence of God in the birth of my two children. I don’t believe anyone can say that there is no God who witnesses the birth of a child, and sees the miracle of life staring them in the face as they hold the infant close in the first moments of life.

As a Church we believe that our God is the Lord of Life, the creator of all things.

And yet many of us have asked in moments of great sadness and despair, just as the prophet in our first reading asked, "Where are you God?"

One night I was out on patrol as a police chaplain with an officer. We received a call about a fight between some relatives living in the same apartment.

Once we arrived, as the officer was questioning the 5 adults, I kept the 4 kids busy playing with toys and asking them about their artwork.

I noticed this family didn't have much in the way of possessions or room to live.

The small apartment was home to four generations with the oldest only 48 years old, you do the math.

After we had left, the officer pulled the squad car over and he asked me some tough questions.

He was angry and upset with God, and the toughest question he asked was this: Where is God for that family?

He was upset with what he was seeing over and over again in this neighborhood, it was a neighborhood in poverty. Where was the justice and where was God?

I reminded him that our faith demands not only that we fight against sin, but also against social injustice whenever and however we can peacefully do it.

It is very important for us to protest against injustice, just as the Gospel principles we have learned ask us to.

This officer had seen so much of what some would call the underbelly of society that he had begun to question his faith.

He began to doubt. Yet I saw hope in the fact that he cared enough to question, he cared enough to be angry with God.

By the way, it's ok to be angry with God. God can take it.

"Doubt" is part of the human condition, and few, if any of us, are immune to it.

I find the more we believe and the more we experience the world around us, the more we find to question. The more we may be inclined to ask, on one level or another, where is God in all of this?

Faith grows as it's utilized. Faith doesn't come fully developed and established; it has to grow.

Just as a mustard seed is one of the smallest of seeds and grows into a large plant. Even the smallest faith, as small as a mustard seed, can grow when it's nurtured by a faith community and by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

That's why it's so important to have a place to come together in community, a place to hear the stories of faith and life and to know that God is God.

We need a place to come together in community to grow in holiness and in faith. A place to hear the stories and to hear the Word of God proclaimed.

Of course I'm talking about Church. "The Church, in her doctrine, life, and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, and all that she believes." CCC 98

"What Christ entrusted to the apostles, they in turn handed on by their preaching and writing." CCC 96

We can see this in our reading today from 2 Timothy, Paul handed on to Timothy the essence of the Gospel. It was now Timothy's turn to carry it to others.

Faith is an entirely free gift that God makes to each of us. We can lose this priceless gift, as St. Paul indicated to St. Timothy when he said: "Wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience.

To live, grow, and persevere in the faith until the end, we must nourish it with the word of God;

we must beg the Lord to increase our faith;

it must be "working through charity," abounding in hope, and rooted in the faith of the Church." CCC 162

When St. Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus declared to him that this revelation did not come "from flesh and blood," but from "my Father who is in heaven." *Faith is a gift of God.*

As dark as you may feel at times, or as lonely or frightened, or even angry as you may get about a situation.

Just as the sun sets and rises again to a new day, God is with you and God is real.

Sometimes we may find ourselves like the father of the child Jesus was about to help, in the Gospel of Mark, who cried out to the Lord, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24)

In the words of St. Augustine, "I believe, in order to understand; and I understand, the better to believe." CCC 158

St. Thomas Aquinas wrote, "Faith is a foretaste of the knowledge that will make us blessed in the life to come." CCC184

My friends, "Believing is possible only by grace (and with the help) of the Holy Spirit." CCC 154

Take what faith you have, be it as small as mustard seed, and stir into flame the gift of God that you have.