

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
YEAR C
OCTOBER 2, 2022

“Habakkuk is the only prophet to devote his entire work to the question of the justice of God’s government of the world” (*The Catholic Study Bible, 2nd edition*, 1293). “Habakkuk was concerned first of all with the injustices within Jewish society” (362). We, too, worry about the state of the world and the injustices in our own society, but unlike many today, Habakkuk does not have a belief in a utopia where humankind has itself solved all its social ills. Rather, Habakkuk would warn us against rash actions and judgements. “The person who judges only in light of the immediate present sees no justice in the world and may be tempted to conclude that there is no divine control” (362).

Take the case of *Alice in Wonderland*. The White Queen offered Alice a job being her handmaiden. The pay was to be a few dollars and “jam yesterday, jam tomorrow – but no jam today.” Alice turned down the job. Being young and inexperienced, she had not yet learned that this is the very structure of life: that yesterday and tomorrow often look better than today; the present is often burnt toast without jam.

Think of family life. Love, hope, and great expectations characterize the early days of marital bliss. The future looks bright and cloudless. Lots of sweetness in that future.

Flash forward to the couple’s middle-aged years: their children are grown and in relatively good-stead, so they settle into a new comfortable routine, one that can focus on their own enjoyable leisure pursuits. Maybe they plan some trips or think about new hobbies. Their empty-nest future looks jam-full.

But these are snapshots of past days and later, unknown days. The today might be filled with dirty diapers, childhood illnesses, the terrible-two's, acne, backtalk, ingratitude, sleepless nights, bailing the teen out of jail. The present can look bleak or perhaps pointless.

How can an aggravating today co-exist with a great yesterday and terrific tomorrow? To ask that question stems, in part, from the Western conception of time. We see time as linear, that what came before is – in some sense – only marginally connected with a given moment and having a bit less than to do with what will come after that moment. So, we have only the overly-scheduled present, and we become people with no sense of history, with no commitment to tomorrow. Hence, “linear-Man” finds no meaning in his “today.” Activity is only justified by additional activity, and it lacks any fundamental, overarching purpose. The Israelites saw time differently. For them, time was cumulative (not linear): yesterday continued into today continued into tomorrow – the past was never past – as William Faulkner wrote – and the future was never unmoored from yesterday and today. Hence, the Judeo and Christian present remains pregnant with meaning.

The whole of life is greater than the sum of its parts: even if many parts are bad. Think of Adam and Eve befouling the Garden of Eden. By definition, paradise is the state in which nothing can get any better, any yummier. Yet, the addition of that slimy serpent into the mix occasioned a much better whole for everyone in the fullness of time. That is why Christians call the Fall and the Original Sin a “Happy Fault,” because without it we never would have had the joy of jamming with Jesus.

Habakkuk asks the Lord, as we ask the Lord, “How long, O Lord, must I cry ... out to you, ‘Violence!’ and you do not intervene? Why do you let me see iniquity? Why do you simply gaze at evil?” (Hb 1:2, 3). The present world is so disenchanting: filled with violence and mortal

sin. The prophet says that the Lord answers, “My people will not be disappointed. If the appointed time delays, just wait for it; it will surely come, it will not be late. Have faith” (Hb 3, 4).

This “faith” of which Habakkuk speaks is not used in the same manner in which St. Paul and we modern Christians ordinarily use the word. “The faith of Habakkuk is a faith against appearances. [Modern, scientifically-oriented, sensibilities – believing only in what can be empirically verified – trust only in appearances.] The faith of Habakkuk is based on the [*metaphysical*] conviction that God is just, and so justice must ultimately prevail (363). Ultimately: as in “at the end of time,” as in beyond time: not in time, not on this earth.

The whole of life – mortal and eternal – is greater than the sum of its parts. And the White Queen is right: there was jam awhile ago, there will be jam later, but no jam today. We’ll just have to continue prayerfully waiting for it. As the prophet, the Apostle, and Jesus himself all said, “Wait for it.”