

OCTOBER 5 2025 FATHER PETER JAE CHOI

Jesus said to His disciples, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. But, like how? Don't the plants need soil and fresh water? I am not a farmer, but a cityboy, and I even know that salt kills plants. I read somewhere that according to legend, when the Romans won the war against Carthage, they not only burned down the city but also salted the earth to ensure that the city couldn't be revived. So what did He mean? Jesus didn't teach this just once, but repeated in the Gospel of Matthew, by saying, "if you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain "move from here to there" and it will move." And He didn't stop there. He added, "and nothing will be impossible for you." We all know that nothing is impossible with God. But did God really mean that nothing will be impossible for us, if we believe? What would you do if you were challenged to move a mountain and your life depended on it? There is a mountain in Egypt called Mokattam that actually moved, thereby saving the lives of all Coptic Christians living in Egypt in the 10th century.

Here is the story: Towards the end of the 10th century El-Mu'izz became the Caliph of Fatimid Caliphate, and ruled Egypt. He had a Jewish minister who converted to Islam, and he especially disliked the Coptic Christians. He was looking for an opportunity to persecute them. So the Jewish minister one day concocted a plan to get rid of the Christians. He approached the Caliph and showed this verse from the bible, "If you have faith the size of a

mustard seed, you will say to the mountain ‘move from here to there’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.” He then convinced the Caliph to summon the Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Pope Anba Abraam the Syrian, to prove the validity of the Christian Faith by proving it with a miracle. The Patriarch had three days to move Mokattam Mountain which was located just outside of Cairo, or choose one of the three consequences: All Coptic Christians must accept Islam, leave Egypt all together, or stay and face the death penalty.

Now the Coptic Christian’s life depended on moving an actual mountain, otherwise they would have to convert, leave or die. As you can imagine, the Coptic Patriarch called upon all Coptic Christians for a three day fast and to pray fervently to God, pleading with God to intervene and move Mokattam Mountain. On the third day of the fast, Our Blessed Mother appeared to the Patriarch and told him that there will be a miracle. She told him to find a devout and religious man who had only one eye. Soon the search began and a man with one eye was found. His name was Simon, who is known as St. Simon the Tanner. Soon, Simon joined the congregation who had gathered near Mokattam Mountain and prayed together, “Kyrie-Eleison” (which means Lord, have mercy in Greek). Each time they cried out, Kyrie-Eleison there was an earthquake and Mokattam Mountain moved. Scared, the Caliph told the Coptic Christians to stop their prayers. This miracle saved the Coptic Christians and their faith. After this miracle Caliph El-Mu’izz not only ended the Christian persecution, but also offered money to help renovate the deteriorating Coptic churches.

We all know that faith can and does make a difference in our lives. But being so used to fast foods, quick answers from internet search engines, and instant gratification, we are not used to having to wait and having to believe. Faith doesn't mean we will have all the answers, at least not in this life. Jesus teaches us in today's gospel that we don't need all the answers. Faith is trust rather than certainty. Faith gives us meaning to life. Faith also gives us vision that far exceeds this earthly life.

In today's first reading, Prophet Habakkuk, who was feeling the burden of office, complained about the prevalence of injustice and God's failure to intervene. Corruption and injustice are unfortunate realities we have to live with everyday. So I do sympathize with him. God indeed responded to him and assured him that in due time God will intervene to save those who trust in Him. In the meantime they were to remain faithful and be patient. But it's not easy persevering in faith and doing good.

Sometimes I feel that my faith isn't strong enough, as we heard disciples asking Jesus to increase their faith. The truth is keeping the faith isn't enough. We need to grow in faith, as faith is not full grown right from the start. I also feel that faith alone isn't enough. We need love too. Because faith makes all things possible, but love makes it easier to do what we are called to do. The most generous and heroic things we've done in our lives are not performed out of a sense of duty, or in the hope of monetary compensation, but borne out of love.

God doesn't want us to serve Him and do His will, because it is demanded of us. Instead, God wants to have a relationship with us, and love to be the motivation behind our actions. God loved us first when we were sinners, when we didn't reciprocate His love. God's love for us does not depend on our response, and nor should we depend on the response of others. That's why God's love is a gift, and our salvation is a gift, because a pay cheque is good, but it can't be compared with the joy of receiving a gift. God gave us the gift of faith, so that even when we do not know, and when we can't see things clearly, we can still trust Him and remain faithful.