

[Habakkuk 1:2-3; 2:2-4; Psalm 95; 2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14; Luke 17:5-10]

“How long, O Lord? I cry for help, but you do not listen! I cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not intervene. Destruction and violence are before me.”

Who is the speaker in today’s First Reading? A parent whose child is dying of cancer? A wife awaiting the return of her husband from a fourth military deployment? An elderly person who keeps reading about school or workplace shootings? A young person who is afraid that the next terrorist act is just around the corner? The prophet Habakkuk wrestles with the questions of violence and injustice of his time as we lament ours. Including Hurricane Ian.

Why does evil occur right before God’s eyes? Why does God not prevent or at least erase the evil done? If God cannot do anything about it, Habakkuk says, spare us who have to look at it!

Later, when God responds to the prophet’s questions, it is not with answers or solutions. It’s with a promise. A promise of deliverance and restitution. Six times after today’s First Reading excerpt, God promises that the vision will be fulfilled. But it will take faith and patience to reach that day. God encourages us to wait in faith.

In our Second Reading, St. Paul exhorts the young bishop Timothy and his people to keep the faith in the face of difficulty. Note that once again, St. Paul writes these words while sitting in a dungeon in a prison. Only the endurance of suffering can embolden us to the point of inviting others to embrace it. What circumstances in YOUR life could give you that kind of courage? What trials have helped you grow in patience and in faith? I’m sure we could fill two pages!

Between the two Masses this morning, I spoke with three parishioners who told me about their journeys to wellness. To find the right combination of medicine, therapy and lifestyle changes took one month for one person, three months for another person, and three years for me. Maybe that’s why the medical professions call us “patients! We need faith and patience in our physical lives and in our spiritual lives!

How different would your faith be if simply arriving at Mass this morning, simply being in this church for Mass, could cost you your life? That is the price our Christian brothers and sisters are paying in the Middle East, in India, in China and in Africa. The Center for the Study of Global Christianity in the United States estimates that in the last decade, 100,000 Christians died for simply being Christian. In their homes, in their schools, in their hospitals, and in their churches. That’s eleven Christians per hour.

Violence. Destruction. Discord.

According to the International Society for Human Rights in Frankfurt, Germany, 80% of all acts of religious discrimination in the world today are directed against Christians. How do we react to those numbers, that reality?

It seems that our own country no longer defends us and our religious freedom; we are placed in the same situations as our Christian, Catholic brothers and sisters overseas. Only we are not being attacked with bombs and bullets; we are being attacked from within by anti-religious government executive orders, legislation, judicial decisions, terrorist attacks on pregnancy centers and personal attacks of violence on Pro-Life demonstrators and door-to-door volunteers.

We can become frustrated, apathetic and numb to all of this sin, this evil. We also realize that our nation one day will be judged by how we treat the most vulnerable. Evil wins when good people do nothing. What CAN we do?

This is where we start. The month of October, in addition to being the month dedicated to the Most Holy Rosary, is also Respect Life Month. We pray the Rosary for our country. Next, we are challenged to reflect upon what the Catholic Church calls the "five moral non-negotiables": abortion, embryonic stem cell research, euthanasia, human cloning, and homosexual unions. Learn why the Church forbids these sinful actions for valid moral reasons.

There is also to consider this month, especially as we prepare for Election Day in November, the seven moral principles developed by the United States Council of Catholic Bishops: human life and dignity; marriage, children and families; religious freedom; the preferential option for the poor; health care; immigration, migration and refugees; and education.

St. Paul tells Timothy, and he says to US: Stir into flame the gift of God. Do not be ashamed of your testimony as a voting Catholic with a well-formed and informed conscience. And we'll say, as the servants in today's Gospel parable do, "No big deal: we obey because that's our job." It's also, we might add, "our joy and our pleasure."

Here to speak about another way we can respect life and put our faith into action through a new ministry in our parish is Stacey Conte from the Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers of Macomb County...