

Homily for St. Lawrence Day Mass 2014 - Deacon Jim Lavin

I'm not usually a big fan of horror movies, but earlier this summer I went to see one because of some favorable comments by a few trusted reviewers.

"Deliver Us From Evil" has all the earmarks of a typical horror film: blood, gore, and surprise pop-outs which startle the viewer. This film, had something else as well. It was directed by the same person who directed "The Exorcism of Emily Rose," and like that film, faith was an important theme in the story.

In "Deliver Us From Evil," the main character is a New York City police officer, who is a fallen-away Catholic, and was in over his head with a case that involved crimes centering around the occult and demonic possession. He encounters and befriends an unconventional Catholic priest who offers to help, but says he can't--unless the officer gets right with God and goes to confession to restore his faith. Later in the story, after the officer's family is threatened, he finally goes to confession and receives absolution, which—by the way—was shown very beautifully on screen.

SPOILER ALERT- In the end, because of his restored faith, he was able to solve the crime, assist the priest with an exorcism, and rescue his family.

Faith is a theme in both of our readings today. And in particular, the power of faith.

In our first reading, God reminds the prophet Habakkuk that even in the face of evil, where God seems absent or indifferent, one with patience will live because of his faith.

Jesus tells us in the Gospel that NOTHING will be impossible if only we had faith the size of a mustard seed.

My friends, as we gather today as a community to celebrate and honor our ministry's patron saint, who great faith allowed him to endure such a legendary martyrdom, let us take a moment to reflect

on our own faith. As deacons, we minister to others as their servant, helping them by attending to their needs and nurturing their faith, but are we paying attention to our own spiritual growth?

Jesus scolds some of his disciples for having little faith and tells them if they only had faith the size of a mustard seed, they could move mountains. But what does that mean? After all, a mustard seed is also pretty small. Yet, as I'm sure many of you know, if you plant that seed, and care for it properly, it will grow into a huge plant. Everything about that huge plant, its DNA, its blueprint, is contained in that tiny little seed.

That tells me this is a very efficient, little seed. Unlike an avocado or mango seed, which has a lot more mass or material, the mustard seed has very little extra "stuff." It's very simple. Very pure.

I think that's what Jesus was talking about. Our faith doesn't need to be huge, but it needs to be simple and pure. No extra "stuff." No obstacles that would hamper its growth. The soil of our soul needs to be fertile, so that God's grace can grow that little seed of faith into an effective minister of his Word.

So what are those obstacles, that extra "stuff" that creeps into our lives and erodes our own faith? Sin, of course, and the occasions of sin. Therefore, we should ask ourselves if we are using the remedies to sin.

- Are we examining our consciences and going to reconciliation on a regular basis?
- Are we going to our spiritual director regularly?
- Are we fulfilling our promise to pray for the Church by praying Morning and Evening Prayer every day? And if not, are we taking that to the confessional?
- Do our prayers include meditation on God's Word or spiritual writings?
- Are we taking care of our wives and children?
- Are we being faithful stewards of the blessings God has given us?
- Are we trusting in God's providence and care? Or are we consumed with worry, fear, and doubt?

I only bring these things up because these are the ones that I sometimes struggle with. I'm sure there are more, but they will all have one thing in common, a lack of humility. Nothing destroys faith more than thinking it's about us and not about Jesus. When we minister to others, do they see us, or do they see Jesus? The more we resemble that image of Christ the Humble Servant, the more effective our ministry.

So let us pray for an increase of faith, not only for the people we serve, but for ourselves. Let us be mindful of our own weaknesses and seek to purge the obstacles that stifle growth of faith in our lives. Let us strive to be small and humble, so that we never forget who we are and who we are not. And let us pray for the same faith and courage of our patron, St. Lawrence, so that we too may offer our lives for the sake of the Gospel.