

Prosthetic limbs, artificial body parts, have been around thousands of years. Years ago, archeologists in Cairo, Egypt excavating the tomb of a noblewoman who lived about 3,000 years ago, discovered that her body was fitted with a tiny, prosthetic toe made of wood with a leather strap that connected it to her foot.

So why am I talking about prosthetic limbs today at Mass? In our Gospel today, we hear the Apostles ask the Lord, **“Increase our faith?”** That’s a big demand. Have you ever prayed that prayer? “Lord, please increase my faith,” I think most of us have prayed that more than once.

The word Apostles used here for **“increase”** in Greek is *“prostithemi.”* Prosthetic leg or arm is not a natural limb. A prosthetic is a manufactured piece added to the body to replace the natural limb with what was lost. Essentially the Apostles are asking for a crutch.

Why did the Apostles make such an unusual request? The preceding four verses to today’s reading has a clue.

Jesus asked them to do two things: 1st, **“Do not cause the little ones (in fact, anyone) to stumble.** It’s better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied to their neck. Wove to them. So, watch yourselves. Pretty harsh warning, No. 2, **“forgive those who sin against you, no matter how many times they sin against you. Unless you forgive them from the heart your sins will not be forgiven.** At this, I guess, the disciples looked at each other, shook their heads and said, “No way, it’s impossible!” And they request, “Increase our faith.”

Remember a desperate father in Mark gospel Ch. 6, who brought his son who suffers from seizures to Jesus and for heal. Jesus replies, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes. Immediately, the father cries out with tears, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief?”

So, if you’ve ever cried through your tears, “I believe, Lord; help my unbelief!” then you are not alone. For many of us, **life is hard. Faith is a struggle.**

Let me tell you a story. Not long after World War 1, a young woman named Maria Kutschera lost her parents when she was little and was placed in the care of her uncle who was abusive. When she was old enough, ran away from her uncle’s house. She worked various jobs to support herself and put herself through college. But her tragic childhood and teen years had left her understandably angry with society and with God.

Maria one Sunday afternoon, roaming the streets of Vienna, Austria, entered a local Cathedral for the purpose of a concert. Unfortunately, the concert was canceled. Instead, a young Jesuit priest was preaching. And after the service, Maria approached the priest and demanded, “How can you believe all this?” he only responded, “Meet me here Tuesday at 4.00 pm.

Maria showed up on Tuesday and been telling the priest of all the reasons she didn't believe in God, all the ways in which God failed her. For more than two hours, she made accusations against God's mercy, against God's existence. Strangely, the priest received her angry rant as a form of confession. He said to her, "Take courage. I am going to pronounce the words, 'Your sins are forgiven ...' God will forget them, and your soul will look like the soul of a new baptized person."

When the priest said those words over her, something happened to Maria's heart. She felt a burden had been lifted. It was the beginning of a new journey to healing from past and remaining to the faith. Maria's return to faith in God affected people all over the world. Maybe it has even touched and inspired your life.

For Maria Kutschera after her marriage became Maria Von Trapp. Now think – who was Maria Von Trapp? Part of her life story is featured in the film and Broadway musical, *The Sound of Music*. Millions of people around the world have been inspired by Maria's faith and love as part of the singing Von Trapp family. What a change in one young woman's life!

It's comforting to me that even the Apostles struggled with their faith. And Jesus could have given them exactly what they asked for. He could have asked his Father to fill them with a power and boldness that turned them into miracle Machines! But he didn't do that. Not yet. And we have to wonder why.

You see, more faith is not the Apostles' need. Look at what Jesus says in response to their demand for more faith: "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, and say to the mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would be done."

Wouldn't that solve all our problems, if Jesus just filled us with faith that erases all our doubts and questions and give us superhero powers to do jaw-dropping miracles? But faith isn't a personal power source that can be plugged in whenever we face a difficult challenge. Faith is an ongoing relationship of trust with the God whose Spirit lives in us.

Paul in Ephesians 2: 8-9 tells us that **faith is a gift of God, not a result of our works**, so that no one boast about it. And Galatians 5: 22-23 tells us that faith is one of the fruits of the Spirit, something that develops in our lives as the Holy Spirit renews our minds and changes us to be more like Jesus. And Romans 12:3 says to think of ourselves with humility and sound judgment "God has allotted to each a measure of faith. We can't work up more faith with human effort: we can only increase faith by drawing closer to God.

A client once asked his spiritual director, "How can I get God's voice get louder?" The director replied, "His voice is as loud as it can get. In the rest of your life, you have to become quieter if you are going to hear His voice."

Is that what we are missing? Have other voices become so loud in our lives that they have drowned out God's voice? We equate faith with healings and miracles. We want a loud and miraculous display of power to prove our faith. Instead, God plants His Spirit in our hearts and minds and makes us grow into people who reflect God's character.

Here is one of our church members sent me in text about faith:

“An umbrella cannot stop the rain, but it allows us to stand in the rain and not get wet.

Faith in God may not remove our trials, but it gives us strength to overcome them.”