

Readings

Hab 1:2-3; 2:2-4

Ps 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

2 Tm 1:6-8, 13-14

Lk 17:5-10

William J. Donnelly, O.S.A.
*Saint John Stone Friary
Villanova, Pennsylvania*

“If today you hear his voice, Harden not your hearts.”

Road contractors look forward to the spring season to undertake the repairing of bridges, water lines, or whatever else is needed to keep our systems functioning. One warning sign at construction sites alerting us that there is a “steel plate ahead.” If you miss the sign, you know the reality as pass over the plate. Maybe we are blessed that we do not know how dangerous the hole is under the steel covering!

The biblical psalms have an extensive list of warning signs like “harden not your hearts.” A hardened heart has the same features as the steel plate. The heart, a sign of compassion, can become rigid by our life encounters. The hardened heart at times buries our dark and broken encounters, creating a cold-hearted person!

Habakkuk, a minor biblical prophet, presents the story of the Jewish community facing the approaching Babylonian army. Their fear leads to a cry for help. Their dark feeling, depression, is that God does not care. A steel plate is forming over their heart, the despair of hopelessness. The prophet announces that the just person shall live because of one’s faith. Faith overcomes the darkness, the growing hardness of heart. Note the virtue of justice as the underlying quality of faith.

Christ teaches “that if we have the faith the size of a mustard seed, the smallest of seeds,” we can live in and through the darkness of a steel plate moments. Faith is the preventive medicine for the Hardness of Heart.

Faith is not known by human touch but by our spirit. A faithful life lives in the dark moments believing in that the Light will overcome the darkness. Hardness of Heart holds onto the darkness.

Think of anger when it mutates into hatred. What is the heart temperature of that person? The heat of hatred takes over the warmth of a compassionate heart.

One of the highlights of my pastoral ministry is the encounter with those who have passed through the darkness to know the Light of Faith. One special example is a mother of faith, who lost the life of her child due to the violence of the neighborhood. While praying, she heard a voice that touched her spirit inviting her to visit the one who took her son’s life. Her challenge: “Do I hold on to my anger, or do I respond to the Spirit that is inviting her/me to visit the murderer?”