

A woman visited me once to ask about a relationship she was in. What frustrated her was that she had to make a decision soon before she was ready to decide, before she knew what was best. She said to me, "Don't tell me to pray about it. I'm doing that, but I'm not getting an answer. Maybe I just don't have enough faith." I didn't think lack of faith was the problem. I think she had faith; she just didn't have what she wanted to know and time was running out. I could not give her more faith. I could only give her my belief that what pleases God is making the best decision we can with the information we have.

We don't know what prompted the apostles to make the request that kicks off today's Gospel, "Lord, increase our faith." Perhaps they had some difficult decision to make. Perhaps they observed more faith in others than in themselves. Maybe they had low self-esteem in the faith department. But I got to hand it to them: They asked for help. A couple of points interest me here: One is the response Jesus makes; the other is the saying of Jesus that St. Luke juxtaposes with this one. First, Jesus responds by saying faith the size of a mustard seed moves mountains. It's like saying, "Look guys, lighten up on yourselves. Lack of faith is not the problem. It takes very little faith to follow me. You're doing all right." But then notice the saying that follows. Jesus talks about how we treat servants who do a good job; namely, we treat them like servants. In fact, if all they're doing is their job, they are worthless servants. He implies that the worthwhile servant is the one who goes beyond the job. So if we're just following the minimum road: "Father, does this wedding Mass count for Sunday?" "Should I compute my tithe on gross income or is net all right?" "How many times should I forgive? Seven?" If we're looking for the minimum in Christianity so we can just do our job, we are worthless servants. We have not yet practiced charity. So by putting these two sayings together, about lack of faith and worthless servants, St. Luke tells us it's not lack of faith that's the dominant problem in following Christ. It's not lack of faith that makes it hard to decide what is right. It's lack of charity. Faith the size of a mustard seed will do, but charity the size of a mustard seed won't.

On respect life Sunday today I'm mindful of all the decisions we make regarding human life: what method of birth control to practice; how to promote the rights of the unborn? How to stop the cycles of abuse? What care to give elderly parents? What if people want to die before their body will let them? Any decision about life demands faith. And for every ounce of faith we need a pound of charity to safeguard and respect every human life.