

Seeing is believing. It's a tenet of our culture. It's not anything new, really. That notion is in the Bible. Think back to the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus. In hell the Rich Man tells Abraham to send Lazarus back to warn his brothers so they do not enter into eternal torment. Abraham answers, "**They have Moses and the Prophets, let [your brothers] hear them.**" The Rich Man argues, "**No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.**" If they see something, they will believe. Abraham gives the firm answer, "**If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.**"

The organ of faith is not the eye. The eye deceives and misleads. The eye sees excuses for not believing. The organ of faith is the ear. It is through the ear that faith is created. This is what we see in today's Gospel. In Capernaum, an official, literally, a "little king," "**heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee.**" Word of Jesus, not just about Jesus, but the message of His preaching, what Jesus did and said, has spread all over. This little king knows who Jesus is. He has heard what Jesus has been doing and saying. That creates faith. This is how many of us grew up in the faith. Your parents read you Bible Stories. You learned Jesus' preaching. It is why John 3:16 is likely the bedrock, the firm foundation of your biblical knowledge. It tells you so concisely what our Father in heaven has done in His Son to redeem us, to deliver us, and grant eternal life.

The little king goes to Jesus, because his son is sick, at the point of death. Parents easily freak out. The first time a high fever comes along, you frantically Google how high it has to be before you go to the hospital. The toddler tumbles down a stair or two, everything stops as Mom or Dad breathlessly asks, "Are you ok?" Consider then when a child is at the point of death. When the illness is quite serious. Where do you go? We know the answer: to the hospital! Call 911. Get the ambulance.

Life's troubles rise, and we seek the solution. Grab the hydrogen peroxide and a Band-Aid. Take out a loan. Find a new job that pays better. Call the doctor. But this little king shows us the first place to go. He shows us where faith would lead us: to Jesus. Faith drives us to our Lord, always, but especially in times of need. That much the little king gets right. And so often, even as we rush in adrenaline to call the ambulance, to care for our child, faith has us cry out in simple piety, "Lord, have mercy!" Or the minutes in the waiting room that seem like days, you sing hymns to yourself, hymns that direct you to Jesus. Because that is what faith, even when it is weak, taxed, and strained, does.

But he is still a little king. And kings like to issue commands. So he asks Jesus to come down and heal his son. Jesus can do great things. We need to get Him here, in Capernaum. It's not going to cut it for Him to be 16.5 miles away in Cana. And isn't that how we often are? Doesn't Satan get the best of us, working up our impatience, our dissatisfaction? "I want my test results, and I want them the day before yesterday!" We get dissatisfied with our Lord's ascension into heaven, frustrated that unlike all the crowds and the disciples in the Gospels, we do not behold the Lord with our eyes. So we ask for special signs, a voice, a miracle, fire from heaven, for the clouds to rain candy. In making ourselves king we would turn our Lord into a genie, have Him at our beck and call, to give us the signs that we want.

Jesus tells it like it so often is with us: "**Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.**" That is so often the obstacle, what the devil would use to snuff out our faith. Make it a matter of the eyes. Enough promises. Enough stories and fables. Enough words for the ears. Give me something for my eyes. The little king insists: "**Sir, come down before my child dies.**" You can hear the desperation in his voice, the tears are rolling down his face. Why will Jesus not listen?! What is He waiting for?! Who among us has never asked that?!

And Jesus says: "**Go; your son lives.**" The Greek is not a future, but a present tense. It's a statement of fact. Jesus doesn't say, "Your son will live, he's going to be healed." Jesus says here nothing about the future. Jesus tells the little king to go on his way because his son lives. He is alive right now. And on the basis of that word, the little king believes. He trusts in the Word of Jesus which he received. The organ of faith is the ear. His faith is strengthened. And he goes home without a word about what he will find: a healthy son, or a body that needs to be buried. Either way, the little king has the word of Jesus that his son is alive to Jesus. So he goes, his faith strengthened by the Word

of Jesus. He no longer insists that Jesus help him on his own terms. He believes, he trusts what Jesus says, and that it is enough even in midst of a very real trial.

And we with the little king made a humble, believing child of God, we find that the Lord, in His mercy, does a sign. As He did earlier in Cana, where the sign was done from a distance, as water became wine on its way to the master of the feast, so also from a distance, in Capernaum, the son is healed at the very moment of Jesus' word. This sign strengthens, it confirms the faith which the little king already had. The little king tells the people in his household what Jesus said and they believe. The organ of faith is the ear. Or as St. Paul says, "**Faith comes by hearing.**"

People loved by God, so it is with us. Our faith is tested in this life. Many of you have in the past, or currently are suffering the effects of living in a world that is ruled by the devil. Creation groans for renewal, our bodies seem to waste away. Our loved ones, our children, get sick, suffer, and even die. We suffer not just the weakness of human flesh and blood, but also the attacks of rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, the spiritual forces of evil who would defile us, deceive and mislead us, who would have us rely on our eyes, and thus fall easily and often into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice.

And so you come here. By faith you know where the Lord is present not just in power and glory, but in mercy. You know where He is present to speak to you, to give you His promises. He gives you signs as well. Not because you asked them or demanded them, but because He is gracious, because He knows you are a creature, a physical being. He gives you tangible expressions of His mercy. He washes you clean of all your sin. With a pastor's hand upon your head He speaks His absolution. With His wounded hand He feeds you His true body and blood. You do not need to clamber up to heaven as though He were gone, had abandoned you and left you behind. He comes here. He comes to you, to forgive, renew, and strengthen.

Thus you are reminded of all that He has done for you. You are not just armored for battle, you are delivered the tokens of His battle against your enemies which He has already won. The victory is secured for you. You are equipped with the one weapon which puts doubts, sin, and the devil Himself to flight: "**the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.**" You withstand in the evil day, the moments of horror and fear, and you will rise on the day when we will no longer walk by faith, but live by sight in the eternal glory of God at the coming of our Lord.

*And though it tarry through the night
And till the morning waken,
My heart shall never doubt His might
Nor count itself forsaken.
O Israel trust in God your Lord.
Born of the Spirit and the Word,
Now wait for His appearing.*