

Nineteenth Sunday of the Year August 07, 2016

Wisdom 18:6-9; Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19; Luke 12:32-48

Our Christian faith is based on the personal love of God towards each one of us. Through faith wonders have been carried out throughout the ages. Thanks to faith we ourselves believe in the divine presence and in his providential care. But true faith is nothing without love. It is love which is the driving force of faith; it is love which pushes the men and women living on this earth to believe, with all their heart, in God the Father who is caring for us. Faith and love do good work: together they lead man towards God, towards that food which is the Word of God. Today's readings call us to faith, hope and trust in God. In the first reading we encounter the people chosen by God who expected their deliverance from Egypt and they trusted in God's promise. At the same time it tells us that true wisdom comes with giving priority to a right relationship with God. The second reading we hear about the faith of the people of Israel who trusted in the Lord. We have the example of Abraham who showed constant faith and remained faithful to God. Abraham begins his pilgrimage of faith in his old age to move to a foreign land in answer to the God's call, not knowing where all of this will lead him. In the Gospel of today Jesus tells us as he tells his disciples not to be afraid because it is the Father's desire to give us the kingdom. Further Jesus says where your treasure is, there will your heart be also and calls us to build that treasure which cannot be robbed by any thief or destroyed by any moth. He leads us to the practical lesson namely to be prepared and ready to receive the Lord at any time.

In today's First Reading, from the Book of wisdom the author reminds us that people who gain wisdom through their relationship with God enjoy advantages in life not available to those who choose to ignore the things of heaven. Here the author of the Book intends to encourage the readers to persevere in their life of faith in spite of the opposition and difficulties. In this passage we have the illustration of the Exodus events, the account of the tenth plague, in which God showed his mighty power to save his chosen ones from their enemies. Moses gave detailed instructions to prepare for it and they put their trust in God and received the reward of the Promised Land. The reading confirms that God's faithful people were the heirs of God's kingdom. In secret the chosen people offered sacrifices and lived according to the Divine Law and manifested their faith during their days of captivity in Egypt. The night to which the reading refers was the night of the Passover, the night in which they were saved and they began their march to the Promised Land. Their faith and perseverance, through blessings and dangers, were

in the hope of sharing in the glory of the saints. Finally God as he had promised through the prophets delivered His chosen people and destroyed their enemies. Through the fulfillment of this unsurpassable victory, God was glorified through His people.

The Second Reading of today tells us of the faith and patience of Abraham, his wife Sarah, Isaac and Jacob. Faith in the letter to the Hebrews involves trust and hope in God. What God has promised is not only future glory but also obtaining things unseen. Reviewing the faith of Abraham, we admire the Patriarch as he obeyed God and left his homeland for the Land promised by God. There he lived in tents throughout his entire life, always looking towards to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. In his heart, he desired a better country, that is, a heavenly one, the inheritance of the promises of God. Abraham did shine in his faith and obedience. He believed that though barren, his wife would conceive, even when she was old and beyond the age of conceiving. He believed that although he was in his old age, descendants would be born of him, these numbering as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand on the seashore. When asked to sacrifice his son Isaac, he believed that God could raise someone from the dead and he obeyed God. Abraham had faith in God, patiently waiting to see how the goodness of God would develop. Such faith and patience is the model that all Christians should strive to imitate.

The Gospel reading of today begins with an antidote of anxiety, to put aside all fear, to trust in God and to spend all energy in serving others. Jesus is encouraging his followers that they have no need to be filled with worry or anxiety about how they will be provided for. The way we handle material goods determines whether we have earthly treasures or treasures in heaven. The Gospel is consistent in teaching us that true security is to be found not in wealth or possessions but in the providence of God. The emphasis of the passage moves quickly from anxiety to that of watchfulness. Luke was convinced that the end time and the second coming of Jesus could not be predicted. Still the disciple could not live a life as if all this did not exist. Its two stories tell us to be ready for the Lord's coming into our lives. These focus on the interaction between the masters and the servants. They begin with the servants waiting for their master's return during a wedding. In our Lord's time on the day of the wedding the bridesmaids assembled in the house and the groom came with his friends and all welcomed him. There was a joyous procession illumined by lamps and torches. But no one knew the exact time of the arrival of the bride groom. The good servant is the one who is always watchful and thus always prepared even for the unexpected. When the Master finds such a

servant ready he is even ready to reverse the roles, sit the servants at the table and wait on them. Our Lord says he will come in a similar way or more humourously, like the thief who comes at an unexpected time with the motive to steal. His coming will be unexpected but we have to be prepared for it.

Then is the story of the steward. A steward is one who took care of the house and the servants in the absence of the master. This man's mistake was that he did what he liked when the master was away. He did not act in a responsible way. He deceived himself saying that his master is delayed in his coming and he could choose to behave as he wanted. The steward's second mistake was that he thought he had plenty of time to put things right before the master returned. The servant would be shocked when the master comes suddenly and unexpectedly and then he will deal with him harshly. The master expected the servants to be ready always. Generally the lamp was kept lit as it was the only means of light at night. The lamps required frequent care and trimming. When the master finds the servant thus prepared he will be rewarded. The disciples of Jesus must always be ready to receive him when he calls and the disciple will receive his reward.

The Gospel begins with the tender words that Jesus speaks to his Apostles and to all people in general: Do not be afraid any longer, little flock. Elsewhere Jesus said, "Fear is useless, what is needed is trust." Fear is the feeling of anxiety caused by the presence or pending presence of danger which can be physical, spiritual, mental, emotional or moral. We fear all kinds of things: we fear losing our health, losing our jobs, losing a family member or good friend. We fear living alone, fear dying alone, fear rejection, failure, losing money. We may fear intimacy or being abandoned. Many of our fears go unrecognized because, like other unpleasant emotions, we repress or deny them. Fear hinders our spiritual and psychological growth. Our fears hold us in bondage and prevent us from experiencing the freedom of the children of God. Dealing with our fears daily offers us the opportunities to grow spiritually and psychologically. We can allow our fears to paralyze us or we can confront them. Taking action in the face of fear will help to build our courage. The choice we make will determine whether we grow spiritually and psychologically or whether our growth remains stunted.

This Gospel asks us to be truly ready to face the ultimate, implying that that man, in spite of all his efforts to build up his human and material security, is in reality, far from being ready for the master. If we return to the last Sunday's story of the Rich Fool, we see that he pictured a long and bright future before him and the material wealth is the reward of a "successful" life. But he was not prepared to

receive God. Jesus tells us today to be ready and to be prepared when the Master comes. For all our care and precautions, there is absolutely no way we can know when or how the Master will come to call us to himself. Jesus is warning us today about something much more important than the property we own, namely, the quality of our lives. We have build on it and prepare for the Lord who can come at any time. After having persevered in our living faith throughout our lives, we should not be counted among those lost forever. We have to have our lamps lit and keep them burning so that it shows light to all. We are asked to be alert and not sleeping when the Lord comes. Immediately Jesus adds that it is the Father's good pleasure to give them the Kingdom. In other words, the Kingdom of God has been created for us, for our eternal joy and peace in the continuous presence of God. The joy of the Lord and His angels is to see each and every one of us finding our way home to the spiritual Kingdom.

There is another perspective to the theme of watchfulness. This is evident in the question of Peter who asks Jesus whether the parable is meant for the disciples or for everyone. There is an ecclesiological interpretation is offered by Jesus. Leaders of the Christian community must be faithful, refrain from all sorts of abuse, and not cause any harmful problems for the church. Each person is accountable for his own deeds and has to give account to the Lord. Hence to rely on the Lord is essential in our spiritual and ecclesial life. He tells us that those who persevere in their living faith, they are blessed. Secondly, faith and patience are regarded as spiritual virtues that are so great in the eyes of God that as a reward to those who possess these qualities, Jesus will sit down with them, serve them and eat with them. This will take place in the Kingdom of God. Our Lord explains that he expects greater fidelity and diligence from the disciples than from the ordinary faithful, because he has appointed them his stewards to take care of his people. He has given the disciples greater gifts and therefore he demands greater responsibility. The greater the gifts given to the individual whether they are of grace, of mind or of earthly goods, the greater must be his response. The Christians be it steward or ordinary who does deliberately offends God by not fulfilling his responsibility, expresses his unworthiness before God. What the Lord expects is our fidelity to him.

Jesus concludes His teaching by saying, "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded." In other words, we have to be accountable for our deeds. Those who are entrusted with the care of souls, more will be demanded of them. This includes each one of us, clergy, religious, teachers, parents and all

Christians who have the task of proclaiming the kingdom of God. To retain a vibrant faith Jesus makes three demands of his followers. First we are to share with the needy. It is the only worthwhile treasure that waits in heaven. Secondly we have to be vigilant and prepared and live that life integrated by faith. Thirdly, whatever be our task in life, we must carry it out faithfully and responsibly in a spirit of service. In the Scriptures we see the faith of Abraham that caused him to leave familiar territory and later consider sacrificing his own son. The faith of Moses and Israelites made them to leave Egypt the place in the middle of the night and move towards the Promised Land. Jesus was a person filled with faith and always placed his trust in the Father. To be like them our faith has to be renewed daily and in fidelity.

Placing all the three readings together the message that is given to us is to have deep faith in God and leave behind all things that can draw us away from him. Faith gives us a new outlook, a new set of values, a new world of meaning. Even all science is resting on the basis of faith and assumes the permanence and uniformity of natural laws. God tests the faith of all. The Book of Wisdom reminds the Jews of a sign of faith and hope for all times. The Letter to the Hebrews reminds of those who experienced faith in their lives and put it into practice. The Gospel tells us that we ought to be prepared and trust in the master which is the acceptance of faith in our lives. To retain a vibrant faith, the Lord makes three demands of his followers. First, we are to share with the needy. That is the only worthwhile treasure that awaits us in heaven. Secondly, we have to be vigilant and prepared and live lives integrated in faith. Finally whatever be the task in life we must be ready to carry it out faithfully and responsibly in a spirit of service. At the heart of the Christian faith is the notion that God, who called us by name from all eternity, made us unique and he loves us with a love that is infinite. He wants a response from us. Today we must be constantly on our guard to preserve our faith and find the strength and courage to share its light with those who do not understand it.

A boy and a girl were playing together. The boy had a collection of marbles. The girl had some sweets with her. The boy told the girl that he will give her all his marbles in exchange for her sweets. The girl agreed. The boy kept the biggest and the most beautiful marble aside and gave the rest to the girl. The girl gave him all her sweets as she had promised. That night, the girl slept peacefully. But the boy couldn't sleep as he kept wondering if the girl had hidden some sweets from him the way he had hidden his best marble. Moral of the story: If you don't give your

hundred percent in a relationship, you'll always keep doubting if the other person has given his/her hundred percent..

A man was selling balloons at a fair in the tribal village. He had balloons of different colours, including red, yellow, blue, black and green. To attract the attention of children he would release the gas filled balloons into the air. When children saw the balloon go up, they would jump with joy and rush to buy one or more. The balloon man was busy filling the air in the balloon and selling them, he realized someone tugging his shirt sleeves. He looked down and saw a little tribal boy dark in complexion pointing to a black balloon and asking him whether that will go up high. For a moment the person was taken aback asking himself why the boy asked this question. Then seeing his dark complexion he realized the reason for it. He then caressed the boy and said, "Son it is not the colour of the balloon that makes it go up the sky but what is within it that makes it go up. It is the air that I fill in it go up right into the sky."

Fr. Eugene Lobo S.J. Bangalore, India