

FIRST READING: Wisdom 18:6-9

A reading from the Book of Wisdom:

The night of the Passover was known beforehand to our fathers, that, with sure knowledge of the oaths in which they put their faith, they might have courage. Your people awaited the salvation of the just and the destruction of their foes. For when you punished our adversaries, in this you glorified us whom you had summoned. For in secret the holy children of the good were offering sacrifice and putting into effect with one accord the divine institution.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 33:1, 12, 18-19, 20-22

Blessed the people the Lord has chosen to be his own.

Exult, you just, in the Lord; praise from the upright is fitting. Blessed the nation whose God is the Lord, the people he has chosen for his own inheritance.

Blessed the people the Lord has chosen to be his own.

See, the eyes of the Lord are upon those who fear him, upon those who hope for his kindness, To deliver them from death and preserve them in spite of famine.

Blessed the people the Lord has chosen to be his own.

Our soul waits for the Lord, who is our help and our shield. May your kindness, O Lord, be upon us who have put our hope in you.

Blessed the people the Lord has chosen to be his own.

SECOND READING

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19

Brothers and sisters: Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen. Because of it the ancients were well attested. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By faith he sojourned in the Promised Land as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs of the same promise; for he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and maker is God. By faith he received power to generate, even though he was past the normal age - Sarah herself was sterile - for he thought that the one who had made the promise was trustworthy. So it was that there came forth from one man, himself as good as dead, descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sands on the seashore. All these died in faith. They did not receive what had been promised but saw it and greeted it from afar and acknowledged themselves to be strangers and aliens on earth, for those who speak thus show that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land from which they had come, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better homeland, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac descendants shall bear your name." He reasoned that God was able to raise even from the dead, and he received Isaac back as a symbol.

The word of the Lord.

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

Jesus said to his disciples: "Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your belongings and give alms. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven that no thief can reach nor moth destroy. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be. "Gird your loins and light your lamps and be like servants who await their master's return from a wedding, ready to open immediately when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival. Amen, I say to you, he will gird himself, have them recline at table, and proceed to wait on them. And should he come in the second or third watch and find them prepared in this way, blessed are those servants. Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour when the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come." Then Peter said, "Lord, is this parable meant for us or for everyone?" And the Lord replied, "Who, then, is the faithful and prudent steward whom the master will put in charge of his servants to distribute the food allowance at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master on arrival finds doing so. Truly, I say to you, the master will put the servant in charge of all his property. But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, to eat and drink and get drunk, then that servant's master will come on an unexpected day and at an unknown hour and will punish the servant severely and assign him a place with the unfaithful. That servant who knew his master's will but did not make preparations nor act in accord with his will shall be beaten severely; and the servant who was ignorant of his master's will but acted in a way deserving of a severe beating shall be beaten only lightly. Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more."

The Gospel of the Lord

Reflection for the 19th Sunday of the Year C

The reference in the reading from Wisdom is of the first Passover. The Hebrew slaves knew that the Lord would pass over their homes, marked with lamb's blood, to the homes of the unbelieving Egyptians. They would soon be on their way to freedom and the Promised Land. God would act that night to save them. They hid in their homes, praying and eating the Seder Meal, as the angel of death passed over to kill all first-born males of the Egyptians. They were prepared for this as a sign of their faith in God at the Word Moses had given them. Their act of faith freed them that night. They also knew where God would lead them; to a land of abundance.

Sometimes the translation of the scriptures we use at mass can be a bit obscure. Here's another version of the definition of faith, "Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of realities that are unseen." (The New Jerusalem Bible Hebrews 11:1) Faith is at the heart of our salvation; we believe thus we are saved. It was true in the time of the Exodus for the Hebrew people. They believed that God would save them. It happened that first Passover night. However, for Abraham and Sarah, their hope was far from certain. God had promised them a son. They believed the promise even though their hope was getting pretty thin as they got too old to have kids. God had promised Abraham that he would be the source of many descendants; of whom, by faith, we are counted.

Abraham and Sarah never knew of the Exodus, the Law or the Prophets. They trusted by faith only God's Word. They trusted God no matter what. Their story is not passive. Their lives were full of adventure with twists and turns that another might lose hope. God gave them the gift of faith. Because of that they trusted to the birth of Isaac and then Jacob. It was Jacob who had thirteen children who would build a nation in Egypt and led to the Exodus. They did not know where their faith would lead. It led to us.

Faith involves hope and trust. It's not enough to just keep the faith. To hold faith in our hearts is only one component of having faith. Each time we speak or act, our faith will show. To talk about faith in the abstract produces little. The faith of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob is in a context. They had a relationship with each other and God. Their faith had the context of love. They knew God as they shared love. The one who doesn't know love cannot know God for God is love. God was intertwined within these intimate, familial and loving relationships. Remember, the promise in which God promised the birth of Isaac was, by nature, out of love. Abraham and Sarah along with love had faith in each other. How do our loving relationships reflect our faith?

I worked as a janitor and maintenance man during the summers of my high school, college and grad-school days at St. Benedict Church. It almost, but never did, paid for my tuition. We washed the classroom and teachers' desks. We repaired broken furnishings, changed and cleaned light fixtures, washed walls and windows and scrubbed floors. It was hard work in an era before universal air conditioning. We always got the job done in the two and a half months of summer.

We had a crew of about a half dozen. There were three crews of two. One began on the third floor and one began on the first. The two met on the second. There were two separate buildings.. The third crew, in which I worked for at least ten years, took care of doors, locks, lockers, spackling, painting, glazing and the refinishing of furniture. We always finished on time for the start of school. We worked responsibly in anticipation of a clean school building fit for the students. Whenever I read this gospel, I think of that. Yes, we had a boss who checked up on us and on occasion, so did the parish's pastor. But for the forty hours in the five days of the work week, our three crews did our respective jobs. It wasn't the threat of the boss that motivated our work; it was the goal of a job well done for the beginning of the school year. Each year, on the last day we worked, the boss would provide pizza and soda pop for us. While we served ourselves, he ate and drank the pizza and soda with us. I worked there from 1968 until 1978 when I was ordained a deacon.

The fulfillment of Jesus' parable is not just for the Kingdom of God that will become real when Jesus returns at the end of time. It is a pattern of our lives now. We live as responsible people of faith who live, work and love in the context of our familial, communal, social and ecclesial relationships with one another and with Jesus in our midst. Jesus doesn't up and leave us only to return to catch us unaware. Jesus lives through, with and in us and it is the grace of his loving presence that leads us and guides us in faith to become the responsible people God intends us to be. Jesus remains with us until he returns to complete his mission of salvation. We are connected to each other in the presence of Jesus as we gather as his Church.

May our life in Christ reflect God's grace to all we meet.

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August 6-7, 2022