

19TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

By Al Mansfield

Wisdom 18:6-9

Psalm 33

Hebrews 11:1-2,8-19

Luke 12:32-48

FAITH AND VIGILANCE

The Lord says through Isaiah (slightly paraphrased): “When the time is right, I will act with speed” (Is. 60:22). The Israelites in Egypt waited 400 years for deliverance. To test our faith, God has a way of making us wait a while to see his promises fulfilled. Our readings today challenge and encourage us not to lose faith because, in God’s good time, he will act swiftly and suddenly. It is important, then, to keep faith that we might be found on the “right side” when God’s time for judgment comes.

WISDOM

Our first reading from the Book of Wisdom is a poetic description of the night of the Tenth Plague in Egypt – the slaying of the firstborn. It was the night of the original Passover. This was the event that persuaded Pharaoh to release the Jewish people from captivity.

This night was “known beforehand to our fathers, that, with sure knowledge of the oaths in which they put their faith, they might have courage.” God had promised to deliver them from slavery and finally fulfilled that promise in a sudden, swift, and – for the Egyptians – terrible way! As the line in the *Battle Hymn of the Republic* says, “He has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword.” That night of Passover, the Egyptians felt the “terrible swift sword.”

HEBREWS

Today’s second reading is from Hebrews 11, the powerful chapter on faith. The author first defines faith as “the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things unseen.”

He then gives examples of the faith of the patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He mentions Sarah, who conceived “past the normal age” but in God’s own good time.

The author makes the point, however, that the patriarchs all died in faith, without seeing the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promises. “They did not receive what had been promised but saw it and greeted it from afar...”

Abraham was willing to offer up Isaac, the child of the promise, as an act of faith and obedience. And for this he was greatly rewarded.

GOSPEL

Throughout the gospels, Jesus promises that he will come again and warns us to be ready to meet him when he comes. Today’s gospel begins with an exhortation to trust in God’s care and provision for his “little flock.” We are to store up riches in heaven where “no thief can reach nor moth destroy.”

Jesus encourages his servants to be vigilant, on the watch, ready to serve the master upon his return. In a striking metaphor, Jesus actually compares his return to that of a thief breaking into a house! (Some Scripture

scholars have said that this saying must have come directly from the lips of Jesus himself, because the evangelists would not have dared to make that kind of comparison.)

Peter questions Jesus regarding the intended audience to whom the parable is directed. Jesus responds by issuing a stern warning to the servants (apostles, Church leaders), threatening them with harsh punishments if they get tired waiting, lose faith, live dissolutely, and mistreat their fellow servants.

This gospel selection ends with the memorable verse: “Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still much more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.”

WATCH AND PRAY

Most of us don't like to wait – on anything or anybody! But we must wait on God as a test of our faith and perseverance. If we give up and give in, the 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.” Today, we pray for faith, vigilance, and patient perseverance!