

## Blessed are faithful servants & watchful waiters

19<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year – Cycle C – 11 August 2019

Readings: Wis 18:6-9; Heb 11:1-2, 8-19; Lk 12:32-48

*“Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes” (Lk)*

### Three Scriptural Signposts:

1. The Book of Wisdom – written some 50 years before Jesus’ time – appears to deal with timeless truths. It is probably the last book of the First Testament, written in Greek by a Greek-speaking pious Jew who lived in Egypt, exhorting his co-religionists to persist in their faith despite opposition and oppression. Today’s first reading begins with a historical segment: “That night...” referring to the First Passover when the Israelites concretely experienced the power of Yahweh. The first reading stresses the belief that Yahweh is a God of promises who fulfills all promises. Even though there have been ups and downs in the people’s fidelity and infidelity to God, they have never been abandoned by God, but have triumphed over all their enemies. Therefore, the author exhorts the people to continue to trust God by “singing the praises of the fathers,” which is an exhortation to sing the *Hallel* praises (i.e., psalm nos. 113-118). The Passover thus becomes a historical milestone or memorial of God’s loyalty. It prefigures for the Christian community an even greater Passover—that of God’s Son, Jesus, who will bring lasting freedom built on the foundations of faith.
2. The gospel passage contains the parable of the waiting servants. There is a connection between the first reading and the gospel since the latter borrows elements from the Christian paschal feast: “Let your loins be girded (see Exodus 12:11) and your lamps lit and be like men waiting for the master to come home.” When resting, oriental men would normally loosen their belts which held their long robes; which, when working, were tightened once again to facilitate greater movement and faster work. In Jesus’ times, oil lamps were the only means of illumination during dark nights. These lamps—like our earthen Indian *diyās*—required constant care and trimming. Thus, with their lamps trimmed and ready, and their robes hitched up, they would be ready for any eventuality. The early Christians believed that the Lord’s return would take place at the Passover, much as the first Israel believed that the Messiah would come during that night. When this did not happen, the faithful interpreted His coming as a ‘Eucharistic coming’ in which Jesus comes to the Table to serve those seated there.
3. By addressing his disciples as “little flock” Jesus shows that he loves his people very much though they are small and insignificant in number. Echoing his exhortation in last Sunday’s reading, he tells them to store up an “unfailing treasure in heaven where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.” In order to inspire them to invest in what is important for life everlasting, he speaks of unpredictable masters and watchful servants, as well as house owners and thieves, exacting masters and prudent stewards—all with the same message: “*Blessed* are the slaves, servants and stewards who are ready .... watchful .... waiting for the master to return.” When Peter asks: “Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for everyone?” Jesus does not directly answer him but gives him another illustration of what

it means to be faithful or unfaithful. In other words, Jesus further emphasizes his point that the one who follows him (stewards or servants of his church) must be even more diligent than others. “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” (v.48).

### **Linking the Second Reading to the Theme:**

The second reading praises the faith of Abraham and Sarah. Interestingly, this 11<sup>th</sup> chapter from the Book of Hebrews is sometimes called the ‘roll call of the heroes of faith’ because it contains a list of ‘faith-full’ followers. But we must remember that the Bible extols no heroes, as such, since heroes normally proclaim their own greatness while Biblical personages put their trust in God and proclaim God’s faithfulness. The first line: “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” is the only definition of faith that the Bible gives us.

**The responsorial psalm** (33) is a fitting response to the first reading since the psalmist praises God for the mighty works accomplished in salvation history. “Happy are the people the Lord has chosen as his own,” is thanksgiving for being chosen. More than being a privilege, this ‘choosing’ by God is a great responsibility since God chooses ordinary people for extraordinary missions.

### **Three Current Concerns:**

The Servant Concern: It is not easy to be servants, especially when clerics, like everyone in positions of worldly power, are tempted to be sahibs. In living out his identity as ‘servant’ till the very end, Jesus sets an example for us, his followers, of what true service demands.

The ‘Tomorrow’ Concern: Though we see death all around us, we somehow never expect to die so soon, unless, of course, struck by some terminal disease. Thus, we have the tendency to postpone doing things till ‘tomorrow’. But that tomorrow never comes. Tomorrow is *maya*, a mirage. Beware! “The Son of Man comes at an hour you do not expect!”

The ‘Waiters’ Concern: We’re called to be ‘waiters’ – to wait for the Lord’s coming. We rush around at breakneck speed trying to pack our day with activity. Every day, everything is timed, scheduled, programmed and fixed according to *my* time, *my* convenience. However, do I wait for God to work in God’s time, at God’s pace? Tagore wisely wrote, “He comes, comes, ever comes.” Yes, He came at dawn as raindrops washed my windowpanes. He came when we shared Eucharistic bread. He came when my coworker gave me a helping hand. He came when we had a meal this afternoon. He came when that beggar stretched out her hand towards me. He came in that tête-à-tête I had with a loved one this evening. And, at night, He inquires: Did you watch and wait to welcome Me? Alas, I did not!

### **In Lighter Vein:**

To his easygoing disciple the Master said, “You’re destroying yourself by your easygoing lifestyle. Only disaster can save you.” The disciple queried, “How so?” The Master explained, “Throw a frog into boiling water and it’ll jump out immediately. But, place it in a vessel that’s being heated very slowly and it’ll lose the tension to spring out when the moment to leap arrives.” Jesus tells his easygoing disciples: “Get dressed for action; gird your loins, and have your lamps lit!”

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