

**Echoing God's Word
in the
Catholic Community
Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 7, 2022**

SCRIPTURES:

Wisdom 18:6-9	Israel took courage from God's promises.
Hebrews 11:1-2,8-19	Faith in our salvation pleases God.
Luke 12:32-48	We live responsibly since Jesus comes soon.

BIBLE BACKGROUND:

Luke:

By the time Luke wrote his Gospel, the Christian community had begun to experience some distress that Jesus had not yet returned. Some were beginning to grow slack in their commitment. Alienation from their Jewish relatives and friends was not easy to bear. The Temple in Jerusalem was no more. Gentiles formed more and more of the believing community. The forces of Rome were threatening this small "sect" that no longer enjoyed the tolerance and exemptions that had been accorded to it when it was thought to be just another variety of Judaism. What could this "educated researcher of things past" offer to his community that would sustain them and help them persevere? Luke wrote a "gospel" for this Greek-speaking community as Mark had done almost a generation earlier for the community of Rome. (Matthew was now doing the same for the mostly Jewish believers in "Asia.")

Luke has been gathering some of the teachings of Jesus concerning discipleship. We are still with the Lord on his journey and our journey, toward Jerusalem where he, and we, will encounter the Lord God in the mighty transformation of dying and rising. Now, we need to hear this teaching for the long haul. Our journey is longer than we had anticipated. Fear of failing assails us at times!

"Do not live in fear, little flock." Tap into a resource that will never go dry. Gather those kinds of assets that will last, however long it takes. The Lord will come. He may even come in the night when you are not even awake! See to it that your community truly expects him and is prepared for him. His coming again is a gift, greatly to be desired. It means your deliverance. Why should you be afraid of it?

"Preparedness" is the word for the faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. Whether it has to do with what is going to happen when they arrive at Jerusalem on their present journey or whether it has to do with what will eventually happen to them after Jesus has been taken up into glory, or whether it has to do with us who still await the fulfillment of the promise: Jesus Christ will be our strength and our salvation.

Why does Christ delay in returning? The Church at the time of Luke's writing wondered about that. We still do today. Luke answers by having Jesus say, "What does it matter when he comes? You are always ready, are you not?" Church leaders, heads of households, all responsible disciples will have much to answer for, since they have been given so much!

Wisdom:

Attributed to Solomon who lived almost 1,000 years before the book was written, Wisdom recalls an age even more remote: the Exodus from slavery into freedom. This was the formative and defining experience of Israel. God does not forget his people in their need. God delivers. Antiquity confers credibility. The older an experience is, the more real and the more powerful it is. There was a night when God came for the people of Israel. God led them to freedom over their foes. What will God not do for the people now? God does not change his mind. What he did for the Chosen People in ages past, God continues to do. Each day, God comes again for the deliverance of his people. The foe which is the Evil One cannot effectively oppose the power of God on our behalf.

Hebrews:

The Book of Hebrews will be our second reading for the next four weeks. It is not really a “letter” but an extended meditation or exhortation on the priestly role of Jesus Christ. Scholars believe that it may have come from an instruction that was given to Christian converts from Judaism. Some hold that it was meant for the encouragement of Christian leaders who might have become discouraged by persistent persecutions. The author claims that Jesus is superior to the prophets, the angels, and even to Moses. The priesthood of Christ has priority even over the priesthood of the Levites. The sacrifice offered by Christ surpasses all others. The passage we hear today concerns the faith that gives assurance that God will fulfill the promises made.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Does your community sometimes feel that the Lord is taking too long for the return? What are some of your needs during this time of waiting? What would be most helpful to you and your friends during this time of the delay? Do you feel knowing the Scriptures better would be helpful? Would you also feel more secure if you had stored up treasures in heaven through the work of serving the needs of the poor and the homeless? Would you feel better if you knew that all the angels and saints, including the Blessed Virgin Mary, are constantly interceding for you in heaven?

2. How can we develop a more positive and joyful attitude toward the Second Coming of Christ? Can we really see it as a time of deliverance and great reward? A life spent in prayer and good works, a lifetime of faith in the salvation won for us by Jesus Christ ought to bring some reassurance, don't you think? How do you reconcile the fact that Christ is the Just Judge and also the Good Shepherd who seeks out those who were lost?

3. What is the level of trust within the Church concerning the ultimate victory of the faithful over their adversaries? Do you have a feeling that we really trust the Lord in his word about his coming? Do you believe that the Church does not trust enough? That the Church does not take seriously enough the guarantees that Jesus has given to those who believe? Does your parish community exhibit any signs that it does trust the Lord and his word of promise?

PRAYER

Let the members of the group or family list the things that need to be changed in their lives or in the life of the Church before the Lord can return. After each item, let each member in turn say:

**Thy kingdom come;
Thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.**

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE:

The Church proclaims in every age the imminent return of the Lord who will bring to a conclusion and fulfillment the kingdom of the Father. It is just as true today as it was 2,000 years ago that the Lord will “come soon.” It is not for anyone on earth to know just when that will be. We live in expectation as we await the completion of the Lord’s work on earth, as we participate in making that work complete.

The Church believes with utter conviction that somehow the completion of the work of the Church on earth involves the inclusion of all the Children of the Promise, the people of God in the original Covenant, as part of the family that recognizes Jesus Christ as Messiah and Lord. (See: *The Catechism #674* and references to Peter’s words in Acts 3:19-21, and Paul’s teaching in Romans 11:15).

We know that the completion of the work of the Church on earth does not consist in just adding up numbers for membership in the Church itself. It is God who accomplishes the fulfillment in coming to triumph over all the forces of evil in the universe. The Lord has called the people of faith to participate in that work, but it remains essentially the work of God (See #677).

In an agreement approved by the Holy See and by the World Lutheran Federation in 1998, the Catholic Church and the Lutherans have come to a common conclusion that we do not differ from one another on the question of how we are “justified” or “saved” by the grace that comes through faith in the works of Christ. However, the Catholic Church had a couple reservations or additional questions that still need further clarification. One of those bears on the issue of whether we have any role at all in our own salvation. Can we or can we not *cooperate* with God’s grace? The Catholic doctrine upholds the conviction that human beings can and must cooperate with God’s plan of salvation. Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy said, in announcing the Holy See’s agreement to the joint statement, that “without the death of Christ we can do nothing. We cannot save ourselves; it is the Lord who saves us. However, we say we can and must collaborate because we cannot be saved against our will.” So, the Catholic Church is committed to the belief that the completion of the work of Christ on earth has been placed into our hands. We have been made responsible for bringing about the transformation of a sinful world into the Kingdom of God so that Christ can return and present his work, done through our ministry, as an acceptable gift to the heavenly Father. We do have a role in preparing for the coming again of Jesus Christ. We are not just passively changed from sin to righteousness but cooperate with Christ in changing the world.