**19th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C**

**7th August 2022**

**Reading I: Wisdom 18:6-9**

The Book of Wisdom is the product of a Jewish community in Alexandria about 100 B.C. So, though Jewish, it was written in Greek and influenced by Greek thinking. With a philosophical approach, it appears to deal in timeless truths derived from important stories in Israel’s history.

To-day’s passage sounds as if it came from the Passover ritual when "That night ……" would refer to the night of the original Passover at the Exodus. (also see the Easter Proclamation from the Vigil Mass: "This is the night when …………..").

"Our ancestors" in the passage (1st line) means the Patriarchs, who are credited with foreknowledge of the later Exodus. The author of Wisdom then assumes (2nd line) that the singing of the Hallel Psalms (113–118) also goes back to the earliest days. (We still suppose that our traditions are older than they usually are).

As the Christian Church uses this passage, it does so with further layers of meaning. For Christians the Exodus contains within it the promise of the Christian Easter, just as the revelation to the patriarchs contained within it the promise of the first Exodus. The call of Israel thus foreshadows the call of the Church.

**Responsorial Psalm: 32:1, 12, 18-20, 22**

This is a psalm of thanksgiving for the mighty acts of God in salvation history. Its accent on God's choosing of the people (the refrain, "Happy the people the Lord has chosen to be his own" makes it a fitting response to the reading from the Book of Wisdom.

**Reading II: Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19**

Today and for the next three Sundays, second readings are from the writing known as the Letter to the Hebrews though it does not have the format of a letter. It rather has the nature of a treatise or essay. It has no identifiable author and only gained the Canon because it was found in a collection of Paul’s letters!!! (In my opinion it contains some of the finest examples of English prose. For example, just read Chapters 11 and 12 in one sitting)

It was written by a gifted Hellenistic Christian to encourage Jewish Christians who, in face of difficulties and persecution were tempted to return to Judaism. The author exhorts them to cling to the Word of God as unveiled in Christ and to persevere in faith. The force of the argument rests altogether on the person and work of Jesus: Son of God, eternal high priest, who alone offers a perfect sacrifice. It is most likely a document of the second Christian generation and may be reasonably dated in the 80s.

The eleventh chapter of the letter is one of the greatest passages of literary prose in the Bible. It purports to illustrate how the great heroes of Israelite history lead one to recognise the foreordained Messiah, Jesus.

Faith means taking God at his word when he makes promises for the future. Thus, the Old Testament figures become examples for the new Israel, the new nomadic people of God. The new people in each succeeding generation have to imitate Abraham, who "went out, not knowing where he was to go,"

A special worth of Hebrews is its contribution to Christology. For the author Jesus is Son of God; but explicitly, he is the Son who 'had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect' (2:17), a Son who 'in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin' (4:15). He is the human being who stands in a relationship of obedient faithfulness towards God (3:16) and who also stands in solidarity with human suffering. Thereby he is a mediator who can bring humanity back to God.

**Gospel: Luke 12:32-48**

Roman society was based on the family unit, which included dependant relatives, children, and slaves. Households were larger than they are to-day and more formally structured. The head of the family (paterfamilias) was the oldest male. He was responsible for the welfare and discipline of the family members. He would lead the worship to the family gods. This arrangement was the background setting to the stories in the Gospel for this week.

The Church was seen as the household of God, with the paterfamilias having gone on a journey, the date of his return being unknown. He had entrusted the management of the household to a Steward who had authority to act in his name. The word for steward was ‘oikonomos’ and he was frequently a slave or a freed slave, whose duties included care for the children of the family and other slaves. It was a responsible position but would receive correspondingly greater punishment for misdemeanours than one who acts in ignorance.

The reading contains five separate units, which probably originated on different occasions. As featured in the Gospel, they are read in different circumstances again. For example, in the fourth paragraph, concerning Peter’s question as to Jesus’ intended audience, Peter was probably thinking of ‘disciples’ vis a vis ‘public’ But, when the Gospel was being read in a Eucharist thirty years later, it would be understood as contrasting ‘clergy’ vis a vis ‘laity’ in the congregation.

The previous paragraph also bears evidence of the 60s with its reference to the second or third watch of the night. The Lord had not returned in the way Christians had understood and they were struggling to find explanations. Had they been wrong? Had they misunderstood? What was the reality? Luke’s version of Jesus’ story appeals for patience and anticipation within a state of constant speculation.

There are three uncommon details worth noting.

One in the third paragraph, is the fact that the ‘master’ waits on the ‘servants’ on his arrival home. The word for Master is Kurios (Lord) as only used of Jesus and the word for servants is Doulos (slave). The scene is the return of the Lord in the Parousia at the end of time. Luke makes clear that the Lord is unlike any other earthly master (see 17:7-10) and two other passages spring to mind: 'I am among you as one who serves' (22:27) and 'I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet' (John 13:14). The feast in mind is the Messianic Feast to be held at the return of the Lord. One might also add that the knocking and the opening of the door sounds like Revelation 3:20 -'Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.' The true disciple will recognise the voice of the Lord.

The second detail worth noting comes in the fourth paragraph. Peter has asked about the position of the twelve in relation to the whole body (of the church?) The time is the 60s A.D. when congregations were becoming used to professional clergy who managed the ‘household’ until the Lord returned. (It was used of a Bishop in Titus 1;7) This story was to remind clergy of their particular responsibilities. It also makes clear that from the beginning there was no sense of guaranteed salvation. Even official clergy could be punished or lost.

It is not insignificant that the story is in response to a question by Peter that Jesus gives his ruling as he was the supreme representative of the clergy.

A third detail, not to be overlooked is that Jesus draws a role model for himself of a burglar. It seems to me unlikely that Luke or any Christian would be brave enough to be responsible for this and it could be evidence of Jesus’ humour or lack of side.