

## 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

### Wisdom 18:6-9

*This brief passage comes near the end of a long section which recounts God's actions on behalf of Israel during the Exodus from Egypt.<sup>1</sup>*

**6The night of the Passover** This was the night of the Exodus when the angel of death struck down the first-born of every Egyptian family. The verse just before this suggests that this slaughter was a just retribution for the killing of many Hebrew infants by the Egyptians.<sup>1</sup> **was known beforehand to our fathers,** This may be a reference to the patriarchs to whom God swore that he would deliver their descendants,<sup>2</sup> but the punishment of Egypt was announced to Israel before it happened when they were given directions to celebrate the first Passover.<sup>3</sup> The only ones spared were in the homes that had the blood of the slain lamb spread around its doorsill.<sup>4</sup> **that, with sure knowledge of the oaths in which they put their faith, they might have courage.**

**7Your people awaited the salvation of the just and the destruction of their foes.** The Egyptians who had killed the male children of Israel lost their first-born, and those who had used the Nile to drown Israel's children were themselves drowned in the Red Sea.<sup>2</sup>

**8for when you punished our adversaries, in this you glorified us** On that night God sent the plagues upon Egypt and as a result, Israel went out into the desert and eventually to the promised land.<sup>1</sup> **whom you had summoned.** "Summoned" means chosen out of all the people of the earth.<sup>2</sup>

**9For in secret the holy children of the good were offering sacrifice** God's chosen people, the Israelites in Egypt, were celebrating the Passover as they were commanded.<sup>3</sup> **and putting into effect with one accord the divine institution.**

### Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19

*The first Christians were Jews who were doing a very Jewish thing: following the Jewish Messiah. The Church was founded on Israel, on twelve Jewish disciples. There was great joy in following "Yeshua" ("Jesus" in Hebrew), but the cost was high. Written in the first century, the author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote to Jewish believers in the Messiah, who, as a result of their faith were often ostracized from the synagogue and from their entire families and communities, from all they had known and loved. These Hebrews, who thought that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, were afraid to put their faith on the line. So they sat on the fence. The writer says to them in essence: "Don't sit on the fence, don't throw away your confidence, don't turn back. Come all the way to Christ. Come all the way to salvation. Christ is better than Moses! Moses was a servant in God's house; Christ is the Son."<sup>15</sup>*

### Brothers and sisters:

**1Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen.** The Christian existence is marked by assurance that the goods promised by God will be fully possessed in the future and it is also marked by the conviction that the past and present facts on which that assurance is based (Jesus' saving death and his heavenly priesthood) are indeed facts and not illusion.<sup>2</sup> The beginning point of faith is believing—"He is what he says." The end point is believing in God's promises—"He will do what he says."<sup>4</sup>

**2Because of it the ancients were well attested.** These were figures in Israel's history who were examples of faith and trust in the word of God.<sup>1</sup> **By faith Abraham** There is continuity from Abraham to us and that is why his act of faith remains a model for us.<sup>5</sup> **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.** Paul has already proposed Abraham as the proto-type of the Christian believer. His faith is

exemplified by his obedience to God's command when he gave up all the security and comfort of his native land in Ur of the Chaldeans to set out for a distant and unknown place, the land of Canaan. Neither the love for his homeland nor the pleasure of his neighbors' company nor the comforts of his father's home were able to weaken his resolve. One cannot love God perfectly unless one renounces all attachment to perishable things. Escriba reminds us to "never forget that Christ cannot be reached without sacrifice. You have to get rid of everything that gets in the way."<sup>6</sup>

**8**By faith he sojourned in the promised land When we set out on our own spiritual journey which God opens for us, we do not know where we are going. We journey day after day along a way of faith where the light does not reveal any horizon, and our courage comes only from our hope.<sup>5</sup> **as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs of the same promise;** In his time in the promised land, Abraham and his clan did not rule the land; so he sojourned there as a foreigner. He looked forward beyond his time to the heavenly city that would be his real and eternal home.<sup>1</sup> Abraham had confidence that his descendants would possess the land, although he would be only a sojourner in it.<sup>2</sup>

**9**for he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and maker is God. The author interprets Abraham's sojourn in Canaan as an indication of his realization that his permanent dwelling was not to be anywhere on earth, but in the heavenly city; in this, he is made to resemble the Christian believer.<sup>2</sup>

**10**By faith he received power to generate, even though he was past the normal age—and Sarah herself was sterile—for he thought that the one who had made the promise was trustworthy. This refers to the incident when Abraham was given the promise of the birth of Isaac.<sup>2</sup>

**11**So it was that there came forth from one man, himself as good as dead, This is a description of Abraham's advanced age at the time of Isaac's birth.<sup>6</sup> **descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sands on the seashore.**

**12**All these died in faith. They did not receive what had been promised but saw it and greeted it from afar This comparison is taken from seafaring: when from afar sailors espy the city they are making for, even before entering the port they cheer in greeting.<sup>6</sup> **and acknowledged themselves to be strangers and aliens on earth,** This showed that they were heading to their homeland, the heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup>

**13**for those who speak thus show that they are seeking a homeland. We are in the world but not of the world. Between Abraham, who left Ur to travel to the land of Canaan, and the people of Israel, who left Egypt for the promised land, there is an obvious parallel, which is even more marked if one bears in mind that neither Abraham nor the Israelites led by Moses were destined to take possession of the land; that was reserved to their descendants.<sup>6</sup>

**14**If they had been thinking of the land from which they had come, they would have had opportunity to return. The author attributes to all the patriarchs the acknowledgment that their homeland is in heaven.<sup>2</sup>

**15**But now they desire a better homeland, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God Seeing their faith and fidelity, God overlooked their sins and faults. (This verse is written in the present tense to show us that God is disposed to act in the same way towards Christians at the present time.)<sup>6</sup> **for he has prepared a city for them.**

**16**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, Abraham's readiness to offer Isaac is particularly striking because his hopes for the fulfillment of God's promise were bound up with the boy.<sup>2</sup>

**17**of whom it was said, "Through Isaac descendants shall bear your name."

**18**He reasoned that God was able to raise even from the dead, Abraham believed that God was able to bring the dead back to life and this gave him the courage to follow God's command.<sup>6</sup> **and he**

received Isaac back as a symbol. Isaac's deliverance from death is seen as a symbol of the Resurrection of Christ. It is also seen as a prefigurement of the Resurrection.<sup>6</sup>

## Luke 12:32-48

*Today's selection continues last Sunday's discussion of possessions in the life of the Christian. Then the focus shifts to the issue of readiness for the coming of the Son of Man. The link between the two sections is trust in God's promises.<sup>1</sup>*

Jesus said to his disciples:

<sup>32</sup>**“Do not be afraid any longer, little flock,** The disciples represent that “little flock” which forms the nucleus of the restored people forming around Jesus.<sup>9</sup> **for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.** To understand this verse it helps to know that when a person was adopted into a Hebrew family, he became legally eligible for all the benefits that were due to him and a full fledged heir to the estate.<sup>4</sup> Through Baptism one becomes an adopted son of God and can henceforth call God “Father.”<sup>11</sup> (CCC 1997)

<sup>33</sup>**Sell your belongings and give alms.** Generosity is an expression of spiritual poverty and helps us to sever our attachments to worldly wealth.<sup>7</sup> The attitude toward earthly goods is a good barometer of what is really important in a person's life for a man's treasure polarizes his heart. All the inner tendencies of a man—his thoughts, desires, activity—are spontaneously directed toward what interests him most.<sup>5</sup> **Provide money bags for yourselves that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven that no thief can reach nor moth destroy.** There is an old saying: there is no pocket in a shroud.

<sup>34</sup>**For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.** By heart is meant the person directs his whole being, soul and body, to what he considers his good. Our Lord's teaching is quite clear: man's heart yearns to possess wealth, a good social position, prestigious public or professional appointments, which he sees as providing him with security, contentment and self-affirmation; however, this kind of treasure involves endless worry and disappointment, because there is always a danger of losing it. Jesus does not mean that man should forget about earthly things but our main aim in life should be God our Creator and Lord, whom we should love and serve as we go about our ordinary affairs, putting our hopes on the eternal joy of heaven.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>35</sup>**Gird your loins** This recalls the preparations for the exodus. The Hebrew people wore a long robe which they are told to cinch up to free their feet for action as they were to be ready to move immediately when the call of the Lord came.<sup>9</sup> The disciples of Jesus are to be ready to open to the Master “immediately when he comes.”<sup>8</sup> **and light your lamps** This indicates the attitude a person should have who is on the watch or is waiting for someone's arrival.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>36</sup>**and be like servants who await their master's return from a wedding,** The master's coming is certain but the timing is not.<sup>8</sup> **ready to open immediately when he comes and knocks.**

<sup>37</sup>**Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival. Amen, I say to you, he will gird himself,** He will put on an apron or overgarment used for work.<sup>9</sup> **have them recline at table, and proceed to wait on them.** Jesus declared at the Last Supper, “I am among you as one who serves”. (22:27) Authority is here expressed in table service.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>38</sup>**And should he come in the second or third watch** Between 10 P.M. and sunrise. These are servants who stand ready and waiting for their master throughout the night.<sup>7</sup> **and find them prepared in this way, blessed are those servants.** The Holy Spirit constantly seeks to awaken us to keep watch<sup>11</sup> (CCC 2849) for we know not when we will face our final earthly battle nor do we know when Christ will come again. Today, through our own gift of faith, by works of charity, daily

prayer, attendance at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, reading scripture and receiving the sacraments, we can keep ourselves ready for when the Lord appears personally to each one of us.

**39**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. He would have stayed awake!<sup>9</sup>

**40**You also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.” God has chosen to hide from us the time of our death and the time when the world will come to an end.<sup>10</sup>

Immediately after death everyone undergoes the particular judgment in accordance with his *works* and *faith*<sup>11</sup> (CCC 1021) where he will either enter into the blessedness of heaven—through a purification (purgatory) or immediately,--or immediate and everlasting damnation.<sup>11</sup> (CCC 1022)

At the end of the world Christ will come in his glory and all the angels with him for the final judgment when he will separate each one as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left...And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.<sup>11</sup> (CCC 1038) Far more momentous for each person is the hour of death than the hour of birth. We had nothing to say about our coming into the world, but we can have much to say about our going out of it.<sup>12</sup>

**41**Then Peter said, “Lord, is this parable meant for us or for everyone?” The answer to Peter’s question directs the discourse toward the Christian leaders especially but the last verse of this section (v.48) makes it clear that there is a wider application for all on whom spiritual and temporal gifts have been bestowed.<sup>8</sup>

**42**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? This points forward to the apostles’ future role of leadership<sup>9</sup> for they (and their successors) were to have charge of the rest of the Lord’s servants, the faithful of the Church everywhere and in every age.<sup>12</sup>

**43**Blessed is that servant This “steward” or household manager is himself a slave just as those he oversees, and despite his relative authority, he is equally subject to the authority of the master.<sup>9</sup> whom his master on arrival finds doing so.

**44**Truly, I say to you, the master will put the servant in charge of all his property.

**45**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,

**46**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. He will be separated from the fellowship of the saints.<sup>12</sup>

**47**That servant who knew his master’s will but did not make preparations nor act in accord with his will shall be beaten severely; This one’s guilt would be in proportion to the deliberate knowledge with which he transgressed the will of his Lord.<sup>12</sup>

**48**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 greater the gift given, the greater the responsibility and the greater the judgment.<sup>9</sup> Each person has some work to do in this world and has been fitted in some degree by his Creator to do that work. No one has been placed on earth just for pleasure and enjoyment, and those who so conceive of their life and try so to pass their time misunderstand and neglect the purpose of their existence here. In the end, at death and judgment, they will be required to give an account of their wasted years and their unfulfilled stewardship.<sup>12</sup>

*Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers:1998” by Lawrence E. Mick, (2) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (3) “Wisdom” by John E. Rybolt, C.M., (4) “The Bread Of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken & Marie Finn, (5) “St. Joseph Commentary On The Sunday Readings” by Achille DeGeest, O. F. M., (6)*

*“The Navarre Bible: Hebrews,” (7) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke,” (8) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Luke” by Jerome Kodell, O.S.B., (9) “The Gospel of Luke” by Luke Timothy Johnson, (10) “The Navarre Bible: St. Luke”, (11) “The Catechism Of The Catholic Church,” (12) “The Parables Of Christ” by Charles J. Callan, O.P., and (15) A Selection From “Honey From The Rock” by Rosalind Moss.*

*In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.*