Reflection for the 19th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle C

The lectionary translation of the readings for this Sunday can be found at https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/081025.cfm

1st Reading: *Wisdom 18:6-9*

The selection we have today, for the first reading, is a reminder to the Jewish people of how God freed them from slavery in Egypt. It contrasts what happened to their enslavers with the wonders God worked for the Hebrew people. It was written at a time when the Jewish people were suffering again and emphasizes that it was faith and trust in God that gave the Israelites the courage to go on.

2nd Reading: *Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19* or *Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-12*

This is a difficult to translate section of Paul's Letter to the Hebrews about faith. Notice that he says "faith is the realization of things hoped for." The author seems to be describing a faith in God that contains a real "assurance" even though the things hoped for have not yet been experienced. From the examples given, it appears that this kind of faith only comes from personal relationship with God.

Gospel: *Luke 12:32-48*

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? Blessed is that servant whom his master on arrival finds doing so. Truly, I say to you, he will put him in charge of all his property. Lk 12:42-44

Setting & Parallels:

Jesus is still on the journey toward Jerusalem. He is still teaching along the way. This selection comes after the person in the crowd asked him to make his brother share the inheritance, the Parable of the Rich Fool, and the section, immediately before, about dependence on God rather than worldly things. Lk 12:33-34 occurs in Matthew. Lk 12:35-48 is similar in theme to Matthew's story of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, Mt 25:1-13. It is somewhat similar in theme to Mark 13:33-37 about the man traveling abroad who left his servants in charge.

Verse by Verse:

Lk 12:32a "Do not be afraid…" | This message must refer to what precedes it, Lk 12:22-31. It means to not be afraid of not having worldly necessities.

Lk 12:32a "…little flock…" | This evokes the image of God as the Shepherd and Israel as the flock as in Ez 34:11-24.

Lk 12:32b "…your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom." | UBS Handbook indicates that "give you the kingdom" means to allow you to reign in the kingdom. AYB indicates the proper translation is "to entrust to you his kingdom" and says this is where "Jesus confers his own kingdom on his apostles." I don't understand these comments since this verse follows Lk 12:31 which tells us to "seek his kingdom", not seek to rule in his kingdom. It appears to me that it means to live under his rule, trusting in it over trusting in the this-worldly. Lk 12:33-34 would seem to bear out my understanding.

Lk 12:33-34 “Sell you belongings…” | This section admonishes us to complete detachment from the this worldly oriented toward total acceptance of the kingdom of God.

Lk 12:35 ”…be like servants who await their master’s return…” | This verse would indicate that living in the kingdom requires servanthood to the master. This seems to be a post-ascension concept wherein Christians are waiting for the Second Coming.

Lk 12:40 “You must also be prepared…” | This does not imply simply waiting while doing nothing other than remaining ready. Maintaining one’s readiness must be an active endeavor. (See Lk 12:42-46, below, and Lk 19:12-26, The Parable of the Ten Coins, to see active servanthood.)

Lk 12:41 “…is this parable meant for us or for everyone?” | Jesus doesn’t answer Peter’s question directly. His answer describes a situation where there are different levels of servant, some in charge of others. This also describes active servanthood. Not just waiting but carrying out duties. Those not carrying out their duties will be punished.

What the 1st hearers heard:

I’m sure the 1st hearers heard that living in the kingdom requires servanthood.

What would change if our community really heard this Gospel?

People would consciously try to serve God in their day-to-day lives.

What is the good news in this Gospel?

If you are doing your job, the Lord will wait on you.

Gospel Reflection

Servant Discipleship

I was ordained in 2001 at age 53. Some people call that a delayed vocation or a late vocation. My friend Fr. Bernie, who is now deceased, disparaged me because of it but that didn’t bother me. That’s what friends do.

I turned fifty while I was in the seminary and one of the young seminarians told me how wonderful he thought it was that I was giving the second half of my life to God. That bothered me. I was hugely offended and wondered what he thought I had done with the “first half” of my life. Even though I was just a “lay person”, I thought I had been serving God my entire life.

When I was young, I thought I had to do something special to serve God, like being a priest, or a doctor, or a community service worker, or something like that. I settled on becoming a city planner and wanted to help make our city a good place for people to raise families.

It wasn’t until I had kids of my own, and began trying to raise them as disciples, that I began to understand how you can serve God no matter what you are doing. For example, we can raise our kids to be good citizens, and to be financially successful… presumably so that they can take care of us in our old age; or, we can raise them to be disciples of the Lord no matter what they choose to do in life. It wasn’t until then that I discovered it is not what we do that serves the Lord, but how we do it.

Today’s Gospel tells us that the job of God’s servants is to distribute the food allowance at the appropriate time. Now we know that the term “food allowance” is symbolic. It means to be “life-giving” at the proper times. That’s what Jesus was, and he describes himself as being life giving in

John 6:51, “I am the true bread that came down from heaven.” All we have to do is figure out how to be life-giving in whatever we do, like Jesus was.

Let me give you an example of a person whom I think is life-giving. I had four doctors before I moved to Utah, one for my heart, one for my kidneys, one for my beautiful skin and one that is called my primary care physician. All of them are impressively intelligent and capable. The all are life savers, so to speak. But, my nephrologist, my kidney doctor, is special.

When I was with Dr. Patel, I could feel how much he cared about me. I wasn’t just a patient to him. I was a person. He made me feel special, like I’m worthy of being treated as someone special. I could feel it in my heart. To be around him is life-affirming. He is life-giving.

We all know people like that. They are the ones who are distributing the food allowance at the proper time, whether they are aware of what they are doing, or not. They are doing it by being an instance of God’s love to us, whether we have a close relationship with them, or not. I think we should be purposeful about serving God but many people just do it naturally.

This week, I invite you to reflect on people you know who are life-giving, who are instances of God’s love to you. And ask yourself, how can I do the things I normally do in a way that is life-giving too? How can I become an instance of God’s love to anyone he puts in my path? How can I distribute the food allowance at the appropriate times, purposefully and naturally?

God bless you all…

Personal Reflection:

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? Blessed is that servant whom his master on arrival finds doing so. Truly, I say to you, he will put him in charge of all his property. Lk 12:42-44

Question:

What words or phrases attracted your attention during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? (Why do you think they attracted your attention?) What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

Alternative:

Share about/Reflect upon someone who has been life-giving to you. (It might be appropriate to not divulge the person’s name.) What is it about the way they interact with people that is life-giving? How has that affected you? What can you do to be more life-giving in your relationships?