

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

August 7, 2022

St. Bavo Parish

Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.

*First Reading: Wisdom 18:6-9 (God's people remained faithful in secret.)*

*Responsory: Psalm 33 (Blessed the people the Lord has chosen to be his own.)*

*Second Reading: Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-12 (Abraham, our father, lived by faith.)*

*Gospel: Luke 12:35-40 (Blessed are the servants who remain vigilant, awaiting their master's return.)*

Today's gospel picks up where we left off last weekend. You may recall, *all* of the readings last week encouraged us, in various ways, to lift our gaze from earth to heaven. Whether it was Jesus warning about the dangers of greed, or Qoheleth lamenting the "vanity" of all earthly things, or St. Paul reminding us that we have all died with Christ, the message came through loud and clear: "Think of what is *above*, not of what is on earth." Jesus now continues that theme, but with a greater sense of urgency. He tells his disciples to think of themselves as household servants whose master has gone to attend a wedding. They have no idea when the master will return, but they know that they had better be ready for him to show up without any warning. The servants who have grown complacent or undisciplined will be in big trouble, while those who have remained vigilant and responsible will be rewarded handsomely. Jesus even paints a remarkable picture of the delighted master inviting his faithful servants to recline at table while *he serves them!*

Of course, that would not happen in real life. But, Jesus is trying to convey to his disciples just how much he values their dedication and their faithfulness to their vocation. The parable is supposed to encourage and animate them, not to threaten and instill fear. Still, you can't miss the urgency of the message. No disciple can know when or how his mortal life will come to an end. Some may live a long, fruitful life in service of the Lord, while others may face peril and martyrdom when they least expect it. They could go to "meet the Lord" at any time. *So could we.* So, we had better be ready *at all times.*

Listening to the advice from last week's readings certainly can help. If we keep our attention focused on the things of heaven, rather than the things of earth, then we will be more likely to keep our priorities fixed on the things that matter most to God. That should prevent us from falling into bad habits and self-indulgent behaviors, as well as warding off complacency and sloth. Even if we don't necessarily expect to meet the Lord anytime soon, just thinking about that very real possibility can keep us awake and alert.

However, there is something else that can motivate us even more strongly than imagining a face-to-face encounter with the Lord, and that is a healthy, intimate and ongoing *relationship* with the Lord. If those servants awaiting their master's return truly *love* their master, as opposed to *fearing* him or just feeling obliged to *obey* him, their relationship with the master will greatly affect the way they behave in his absence. They will act as if he's right there with them, because they will feel his presence at all times. A close relationship with the Lord can do the same for us, especially if we regularly foster that relationship through prayer.

Even when we're *not* praying or consciously thinking about God, our love for him will still keep the "things of heaven" uppermost in our minds. Our focus won't drift so readily into selfish desires or material things that have no lasting value. Instead, our minds and hearts will remain attuned to the Lord's will, as they should be.

That constant relationship with the Lord and the assurance of his abiding presence were also vital for the Jews living in the first century B.C., who first heard today's reflection from the Book of Wisdom. As they struggled to live in a society immersed in Greek culture and dominated by pagan beliefs, the author of Wisdom reminded them that their ancestors in Egypt faced the same challenge, but even worse. Before the Exodus, they lived as *slaves* amid a culture that was hostile to them and their beliefs. Yet, they were able to hold fast to the faith of their fathers. In secret, they awaited liberation, clinging to their faith, regardless of how bleak and utterly hopeless their situation appeared.

The example to whom they could turn was the great patriarch Abraham, whose faith is extolled in the Letter to the Hebrews. Note, however, that Abraham's faith was more than just a set of beliefs or a spiritual quality that he possessed. For him, as for us, faith was a driving force that motivated and enabled him to do God's will. *By faith* Abraham obeyed God's summons to pack up all of his possessions and venture out into an unknown land. He knew not where he was going, but he trusted the Lord to guide him. *By faith* Abraham sojourned through the Promised Land. He was a foreigner and a nomad, constantly vulnerable before the many dangers that he could face. Yet, he walked with the assurance that the Lord had initiated his journey, and the Lord would bring it to a good conclusion. *By faith* Abraham and Sarah were even granted the ability to conceive a child in their old age. The Lord had promised the impossible, but they believed that his promise *could* and *would* be fulfilled. Thus, Abraham's faith consisted in both *belief* in God's word and an *active response to it*. By faith Abraham obeyed, he persevered, he trusted, and he received his reward. He acted not just with *faith*, but with *faithfulness*.

Jesus calls all of us to faithfulness, as well – not just adherence to certain beliefs and obedience to a set of commandments, but *faithfulness to a way of life* that is pleasing to the Lord. That's what the parable of the servants awaiting their master's return is all about. The master doesn't leave detailed instructions telling each servant what to do while he is away. All of the servants know generally what the master expects of them. They know how he likes his house kept in order. But now, with the master away, all of them need to take the initiative, embrace their particular responsibilities, and demonstrate how well they have learned to follow the master's way. If the master returns to find them acting in accord with his will, he will be very pleased. But, if he finds them acting in a way that they knew he would not approve of, that will make him question not only their work ethic, but also their loyalty and their love.

We have every reason to remain faithful to the Lord. He certainly has demonstrated his faithfulness to us on countless occasions. He has also promised to remain with us at all times, his Holy Spirit acting as our constant companion and guide. So, let us never grow slack in our discipleship, but remain vigilant and faithful servants, who bring joy to our Master.