

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

19th Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading:

(Wisdom 18.6-9)

A Contrast between Israel and Egypt

The Book of Wisdom is possibly the latest book of the Old Testament, written not in Hebrew but in Greek, for the Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria, just a few years before the birth of Jesus. The book is written against the background of considerable hostility between the Jews and the Egyptians. It vigorously attacks their worship of idols and especially of sacred animals, but is also vividly aware of Israel's vocation to bring salvation to the whole world.

The final section of the book, from which this reading is drawn, makes a series of rhetorical contrasts between the Egyptians and the Israelites at the time of the Exodus. At the very moment at which the Israelites were being delivered from Egypt, the Egyptians themselves were undergoing the destruction of the firstborn. The promises to Abraham to make his children God's people were being fulfilled, while their enemies were being punished.

This was the moment of the Passover, when Israel offered sacrifice and agreed to the Divine Law. Most first readings relate to the gospel reading; however, this reading prepares for the second reading, which is a meditation on the journey of God's People.

Question:

The Christian Passover of the Lord is the Eucharist. How can we make it a moment of commitment to Christ's covenant??

Second reading:

(Hebrews 11.1-2, 8-19)

The People of God on Pilgrimage

The Sunday reading of the Letter to the Hebrews is divided between Years B and C. The author of the letter is unknown; there is no reason to think that it was written by St Paul.

Its purpose was to strengthen Jewish priests who had joined the Christian community and were yearning for the sacred rites of Judaism. So, it sets out to show that the rites of Christianity are superior.

This year we have four readings from the later part of the Letter, of which this reading is the first. The principal theme is the journey of the People of God in faith. The faith of the ancestors of Israel, as they journeyed in faith through trials and difficulties, reliant on God's faithfulness, is still an inspiration.

Outstanding among their acts of faithful obedience was Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his only-begotten son, Isaac, seen by the Church as a foretaste of God's willingness to sacrifice his only-begotten Son to reconcile the world by his obedience. But whereas the resting place that Israel reached was not their final heavenly homeland, the Christian People of God is on pilgrimage to the final place of rest.

Question:

What is it in the Church that nourishes our faith and sustains it?

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

Gospel:

(Luke 12.32-48)

Being Ready for the Master's Return

The reading begins with a separate three verses that once again warn of the danger of worldly possession. This is a danger against which Luke, writing to a prosperous audience, continually warns. Then comes a series of warnings to be alert for the final meeting with the Lord, and a series of blessings on those who are so ready.

Luke does not have a great scene of a universal final judgement, like Matthew's parable of the sheep and the goats. There is no need to wait for a great final judgement scene at the end of the world. Luke, with his Greek frame of mind, is more interested in the individual judgement, for each of these parables concerns a single individual who is rewarded or punished. This is fully compatible with the notion that each individual's final judgement is at death, rather than all together at the end of the world.

The most wonderful and startling is the first promise that the master will himself serve the faithful servant. A second parable concerns the thief who (literally) 'digs through' the wall of the house when the master is off his guard. A third lesson is framed in terms of a slave who misuses his authority over other slaves, and so concerns the misuse of authority in the Church.

Question:

How do you imagine your final judgement? What is its most awesome element?
