



The Word...

The night of the Passover was known beforehand to our fathers...
in this you glorified us whom you had summoned.

For in secret the holy children of the good were offering sacrifice
and putting into effect with one accord the divine institution.

(from Wis 18:6-9)

By faith Abraham obeyed...he went out, not knowing where he was to go.

By faith he sojourned in the promised land as in a foreign country,
dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs of the same promise.

(from Heb 11:1-2, 8-12)

“Gird your loins and light your lamps...

Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival.”

(from Lk 12:35-48)

Pondering the Word ...

“Ah, excuse me...Mr. Luke? The previous section in your chapter 12 here—verses 22-34—talks about Jesus advising us not to worry or be anxious about anything, that God will take care of everything. Now you tell us Jesus says to be vigilant, to be ready since we do not know when the Son of Man will return. This sounds kind of menacing. What am I supposed to do? Did I miss something?”

There are a few important messages in today’s readings, but all go back to one thing: faith. The Israelites, in captivity in Egypt, did their best to keep God’s laws, albeit in secret. Now they must have great courage and faith that God will do what God has promised. In the reading from Hebrews, we are reminded Abraham accepted the transient nature of the life to which God called him. He had great patience and faith in God’s covenant, even though he would not live to see it fulfilled.

And in the gospel, Jesus reminds us of the importance of awareness and faith: not that we are to live in fear but to live always cognizant of God’s presence, so that when God comes to call us home, our hearts will be ready and waiting to accept the divine invitation to everlasting peace.

Living the Word...

The Scouts’ motto rings in my ears: “Be prepared.” But as I got older with more responsibilities, being prepared morphed into: “Be in control. Have plans for any and all eventualities. Don’t trust or assume the best.” Instead, Murphy’s Law—“Anything that can go wrong will go wrong”—seemed more like my experience. But there’s hope, folks!! The older I get, the more I realize I control very little, so getting back to being prepared for God’s call has become easier. One benefit of age is that you come to realize and accept the things that really matter. Blessed are they who figure this out before God calls!

Four basic lessons from today: Be aware, be patient, be courageous, have faith. Amen.

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Aug 8: *"From whom do the kings of the earth take tolls or census tax?... But that we may not offend them, go to the sea, and take the first fish. Open its mouth and you will find a coin worth twice the temple tax."* (Mt 17:22-27)

What's the purpose of this story? It is similar to the passage in Matthew 22 about rendering unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar. It's also topical in the sense that we are to expect and respect secular governments, that theocracies can pose a danger. How often do we hear the disciples talk about the "Kingdom of Israel," to which Jesus responds with the "Kingdom of God?" **Reflection/ Provision:** We are aware of current discussions about nationalism based on theology: Christian, Hindu, Islam, Judaism. Just recently, in a talk given to clergy in Canada, Pope Francis elaborated on this: *"God does not want us to be slaves, but sons and daughters. He does not want to make decisions for us, or oppress us with a sacral power, exercised in a world governed by religious laws. No! He created us to be free, and he asks us to be mature and responsible persons in life and in society."* A word to the wise: Be wary of those who promote theocracies. They just might be "the evil spirit disguised as an angel of light." (St. Ignatius)

Tue, Aug 9: *"If a man has a hundred sheep and one goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine and go in search of the stray? If he finds it, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not stray."* (Mt 18:1-5, 10, 12-14)

Not having been one of the 99 who stayed, I'm not sure how that feels. But I know how mercy feels. And I know I cannot stand in judgment of anyone who strays, no matter how many times they do. **Reflection/Provision:** *"(It is) only in the realm of mercy we can meet God."* (Anthony Bloom) Do you find yourself judging others you deem less pious or observant or holy? Have you ever allowed yourself to meet God in the realm of mercy?

Wed, Aug 10: *"Whoever serves me must follow me."* (Jn 12:24-26) In the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, there's a prayer entitled, "The Call of the King." First, we imagine a human person we would want to follow and what that "following" would look like in our lives. Then, assuming we would want to serve Christ even more, we reflect on what it means to answer Christ's call to follow him. What would I have to change to truly be his follower? I'm afraid for many, "following" pertains mostly to the stated rules of our denomination. *"Mediocrity has no place in a disciple's response: the stakes are too high ...the invitation is to labor with Christ as a companion, not as a servile minion, blindly following orders."* (2011, K. O'Brien, SJ, *The Ignatian Adventure*) **Reflection/ Provision:** *"Be a disciple! Care more than others think necessary. Trust more than others think wise. Serve more than others think practical. Expect more than others think possible."* (Anon.) What will you do to care, trust, serve, and expect more today?

Thu, Aug 11: *"So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless you forgive his brother from his heart."* (Mt 18:21-19:1) I'm going out on a limb here: There is nothing...nothing than God enjoys more than when we forgive one another. Nothing God desires more for humankind than when we go beyond forgiveness to show mercy to "the unforgiveable." Nothing. **Reflection/Provision:** The key—perhaps the only key—to peace in the world is for each of us to reach out to forgive. *"To work for peace is to uproot war from ourselves and from the hearts of men and women."* (Thich Nhat Hanh) Perhaps you suffer from past trauma, abuse by others, or overwhelming shame for things you've done in the past. There is incredible freedom in forgiveness. Start small. Enlist the help of a therapist, pastoral counselor, or trusted minister who will guide you to release the chains that bind you.

Fri, Aug 12: *"With joy you will draw water at the fountain of salvation."* (Is 12: 2-6) **Reflection/Provision:** When you draw water at the fountain of salvation—when you seek and receive God's mercy—do you feel joy? Or are you left feeling guilty or indebted? Remember, God wants to see our joy. Joy that helps us avoid future sin. Joy that enables us to forgive others. Joy that enlivens and refreshes us! *"Alleluia, we are inadequate!"*

Sat, Aug 13: *"Turn and be converted from all your crimes that they may be no cause of guilt for you. Cast away from you all the crimes you have committed, and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies. Return and live!"* (Ez 18:1-10, 13, 30-32) **Reflection/ Provision:** A great bookend for this week's reflections. These are God's words, folks. God wants for our happiness, our peace, our joy. God doesn't want us beating up ourselves and others. As we discussed last Sunday, we are mere specks. Let's get over our self-importance, hurt egos, our real and perceived wounds. Allow the Spirit to comfort you today, and to foster the growth of a new heart, a healed and happy heart within! God bless you as you return and live! 😊