

August 10-11, 2019

Cathedral of Saint Paul

Readings: Wisdom 18:6-9; Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19; Luke 12:32-48

Are you ready? Each year for a about a decade when I was teaching High School religion, an annual sinking feeling overtook me during the first week of August. Uh, oh. School is right around the corner. Am I ready? Are my classes sufficiently mapped out so that in the rush of a new school year in just a few weeks, I’ll be ready. Truth be told, I loved preparing classes and found it intellectually satisfying. But there was no escaping the gnawing feeling that I had run out of time. What happened to summer? Where did it go?

How much more so with our spiritual life! It may be largely due to age, but increasingly, I have been asking myself about my own spiritual preparedness. “Am I prepared for the Lord?” “Am I getting drawn into worldly affairs to such a degree that I forget about God?”

Our first reading from the Book of Wisdom mentions that at the time of the Passover, people awaited the night for it was known to them—they awaited the salvation of the just as well as the destruction of their foes. What we await today is unknown to us—we have not been promised an hour of our knowing. We are to be vigilant each of our days. We are not given the benefit of a vision of an angel.

We are given the assurance that comes from faith, and we even view our own death in that light. “Death puts an end to human life as the time open to either accepting or rejecting the divine grace manifested in Christ.” Our judgment is our final encounter with Christ in his second coming. This is known as our particular judgment, and it highlights the importance of faith.¹

¹ Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph # 1021

A beautiful definition of faith is given to us in the second reading. “Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen.” Faith is a realization—in other words, faith has a goal, it has a definite ‘content’, it is not simply a ‘shot in the dark.’ It is neither blind, nor formless. It is guided, just as Abraham was guided. He obeyed when he was called to go out to a foreign land; he was called to trust and he did.

Our ancestors were told that there came forth from one man, descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, as countless as the sands on the seashore. All these died in faith. They were seeking a homeland; but we are told that ultimately they were seeking a better homeland, a heavenly one. The real challenge for the Christian today is to maintain a foot in both worlds, so to speak without denigrating the other. We are placed on earth for a reason. This mystery of blessed communion with God is beyond all understanding and description, but it is absolutely real.²

Faith is that instrument by which we remain grounded- both in this life and in eternal life to which we are called. It is dangerous to think that our faith will always be secure. In fact, the first commandment requires us to nourish our faith and to protect it with prudence and vigilance, and to reject everything that is opposed to it. Sadly, when people reject their faith, it sometimes has as much to do with rejecting how they see others living their faith as it does with their own doubts.

We must especially guard against voluntary doubt—that which refuses to hold as true that which God has revealed, for this is a serious sin if deliberately cultivated. It leads to spiritual blindness. This is different in substance from those periods of questioning which at times lead to involuntary doubt. Cardinal Newman wrote “Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt, as I understand the subject; difficulty and doubt are incommensurate.”³ Newman died 129 years ago today, 11 Aug. 1890.

² Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph # 1021

³ John Henry Newman, *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, chapter 5. Position of my Mind since 1845

I highlight one specific point regarding the Eucharist. Bl. Newman wrote: People say that the doctrine of Transubstantiation is difficult to believe; I did not believe the doctrine till I was a Catholic. I had no difficulty in believing it, as soon as I believed that the Catholic Roman Church was the oracle of God, and that she had declared this doctrine to be part of the original revelation. It is difficult, impossible, to imagine, I grant;—but how is it difficult to believe?⁴

Scripture teaches that “Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen.” We pray for the grace to see with the eyes of faith, especially in matters of the sacraments. We are called to trust and we are promised that in the end all will be well. The image used in the Gospel was one of an inexhaustible treasure in heaven that awaits. This is most encouraging. Let us rejoice in this promise from the Lord.

⁴ Ibid.