

It was by faith that Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He offered to sacrifice his only son even though the promises had been made to him and he had been told: it is through Isaac that your name will be carried on. He was confident that God had the power even to raise the dead; and so, figuratively speaking, he was given back Isaac from the dead.

■ The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Mt 24:42,44

Alleluia, alleluia!

Be watchful and ready: you know not when the Son of Man is coming.

Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Lk 12:32-40

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

See that you are prepared.

Jesus said to his disciples:

‘See that you are dressed for action and have your lamps lit. Be like men waiting for their master to return from the wedding feast, ready to open the door as soon as he comes and knocks. Happy those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. I tell you solemnly, he will put on an apron, sit them down at table and wait on them. It may be in the second watch he comes, or in the third, but happy those servants if he finds them ready. You may be quite sure of this, that if the householder had known at what hour the burglar would come, he would not have let anyone break through the wall of his house. You too must stand ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.’

■ The Gospel of the Lord.

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READINESS TO RECEIVE GOD'S GIFT

The rather mixed series of instructions in today's Gospel come together around two related themes: God's desire simply to load us with blessings and our need to be on the watch so as not to put obstacles in the way.

In view of the Lord's generosity, the best thing we can do with present wealth is to use it to give alms to the poor. This converts it into 'credit' in a heavenly bank, literally, 'treasure in heaven'. Such is the only credit that survives the barrier of death.

We may not share the anticipation of the Lord's imminent return that the early generations of believers had. But the gospels leave us with a keen sense of life as something for which we are accountable. Like the slaves awaiting their master's return, we are responsible and accountable—responsible for the welfare of others, especially the poor and disadvantaged, who, Jesus makes clear, are particularly precious to God.

This sense of accountability is not at odds with God's being 'determined' to give us the Kingdom. It is precisely because such riches are at stake that the responsibility is grave.

To make the point Jesus uses examples familiar to his audience from the practice of slavery at the time, including references to punishments that defaulting slaves were wont to incur.

In so doing he neither endorses slavery nor implies that God acts just like the returning slave-owner. God's generosity is not in doubt. What needs to be attended to is our capacity and readiness to receive what God has in store.

Brendan Byrne, SJ

FIRST READING

Wis 18:6-9

A reading from the book of Wisdom

Just as you struck our enemies, you made us glorious by calling us to you.

That night had been foretold to our ancestors, so that, once they saw what kind of oaths they had put their trust in they would joyfully take courage. This was the expectation of your people, the saving of the virtuous and the ruin of their enemies; for by the same act with which you took vengeance on our foes you made us glorious by calling us to you. The devout children of worthy men offered sacrifice in secret and this divine pact they struck with one accord: that the saints would share the same blessings and dangers alike; and forthwith they had begun to chant the hymns of the fathers.

■ The word of the Lord.

RESP PSALM

Ps 32:1, 12, 18-20, 22. R. v. 12

R. Happy the people the Lord has chosen to be his own.

1. Ring out your joy to the Lord, O you just; / for praise is fitting for loyal hearts. / They are happy, whose God is the Lord, / the people he has chosen as his own. **R.**

2. The Lord looks on those who revere him, / on those who hope in his love, / to rescue their souls from death, / to keep them alive in famine. **R.**

3. Our soul is waiting for the Lord. / The Lord is our help and our shield. / May your love be upon us, O Lord, / as we place all our hope in you. **R.**

SECOND READING

Heb 11:1-2, 8-19

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews

We will look for the city designed and built by God.

Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of the realities that at present remain unseen. It was for faith that our ancestors were commended.

It was by faith that Abraham obeyed the call to set out for a country that was the inheritance



given to him and his descendants, and that he set out without knowing where he was going. By faith he arrived, as a foreigner, in the Promised Land, and lived there as if in a strange country, with Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. They lived there in tents while he looked forward to a city founded, designed and built by God.

It was equally by faith that Sarah, in spite of being past the age, was made able to conceive, because she believed that he who had made the promise would be faithful to it. Because of this, there came from one man, and one who was already as good as dead himself, more descendants than could be counted, as many as the stars of heaven or the grains of sand on the seashore.

All these died in faith, before receiving any of the things that had been promised, but they saw them in the far distance and welcomed them, recognising that they were only strangers and nomads on earth. People who use such terms about themselves make it quite plain that they are in search of their real homeland. They can hardly have meant the country they came from, since they had the opportunity to go back to it; but in fact they were longing for a better homeland, their heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, since he has founded the city for them.