

A reading from the book of Wisdom.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

The night of the deliverance from Egypt
was made known beforehand to our ancestors,
so that they might rejoice in sure knowledge of the oaths
in which they trusted.

The deliverance of the righteous
and the destruction of their enemies
were expected by your people.

For by the same means
by which you punished our enemies
you called us to yourself and glorified us.

For in secret
the holy children of good people offered sacrifices,
and with one accord agreed to the divine law,
so that the saints would share alike the same things,
both blessings and dangers;
and already they were singing the praises of the ancestors.



Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters:

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for,
the conviction of things not seen.

Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval.

By faith Abraham obeyed
when he was called to set out for a place
that he was to receive as an inheritance;
and he set out, not knowing where he was going.

By faith he stayed for a time
in the land he had been promised,
as in a foreign land, living in tents,
as did Isaac and Jacob,

who were heirs with him of the same promise.

For Abraham looked forward to the city that has foundations,
whose architect and builder is God.

By faith Sarah herself, though barren,
received power to conceive, even when she was too old,
because she considered him faithful who had promised.

Therefore from one person,
and this one as good as dead,
descendants were born,

“as many as the stars of heaven
and as the countless grains of sand by the seashore.”

Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – C 19

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus said to his disciples,
“Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out,
an unfailing treasure in heaven,
where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.
For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
“Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit;
be like those who are waiting for their master
to return from the wedding banquet,
so that they may open the door for him
as soon as he comes and knocks.
Blessed are those slaves
whom the master finds alert when he comes;
truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt
and have them sit down to eat,
and he will come and serve them.

If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn,
and finds them so,
blessed are those slaves.
But know this:
if the owner of the house
had known at what hour the thief was coming
he would not have let his house be broken into.
You also must be ready,
for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

Reading I: Wisdom 18:6-9

The Book of Wisdom, which, with its philosophical approach, appears to deal in timeless truths, nevertheless contains a long section that interprets the salvation history of Israel in terms of wisdom (Ws 11:2-19:22).

It contains a lot of midrashic rewriting of the biblical accounts, much of it apparently emanating from the recital of the Passover haggadah in a wisdom milieu. That is what we seem to have here.

“That night” is a reference to the night of the first Passover at the Exodus (see the Easter Proclamation: “This is the night when first you saved our fathers”). But between the Easter Proclamation and the midrashic haggadah of the Book of Wisdom there is a shift.

“Our fathers” in the Wisdom passage means the patriarchs, who are credited with having received from God the promise (here “oaths,” sworn by God) of the future Exodus.

The author of Wisdom again reflects the paschal liturgy of his day by attributing to Israel’s first Passover his own contemporary practice of “singing the praises of the fathers,” that is, the Hallel psalms.

As the Christian Church reads this passage, it does so with further shifts. The Exodus contains within it the promise of the Christian Easter, just as the revelation to the patriarchs contained within it the promise of the first Exodus.

The call of Israel foreshadows the call of the ecclesia. But just as the old Israel was a *communio sanctorum* of the Exodus generation and the patriarchs, so the Church is a communion of saints that embraces all generations.

Responsorial Psalm: 33:1, 12, 18-19, 20-22

This is a psalm of thanksgiving for the mighty acts of God in salvation history. Its accent on God’s choosing of the people (the refrain, “Happy the people the Lord has chosen to be his own” and the verse “Blessed . . . the people whom he has chosen as his heritage”) makes it a fitting response to the reading from the Book of Wisdom.

The doctrine of election has fallen into neglect in our day, largely because of a reaction against its distortion in Calvinistic theology. It is a thoroughly biblical doctrine.

It does not (as Calvinism has often said) assert that God has picked out certain individuals for salvation and consigned the rest to damnation; rather, it states that God has chosen a people, first the old Israel, then Christ as the sole bearer of Israel’s privileges and prerogatives, and, by incorporation into him, the Christian ecclesia, which is ultimately to embrace in its unity (at least in principle) the whole of humankind.

“It is no formal election of a set of favorites of heaven, who were to earn rewards from which the rest of the world were excluded. It was the election of a people to know what are the rights of men, that they might be witnesses to all men of their rights” (F. D. Maurice).

In this sense we may agree with article seventeen of the **Thirty-nine Articles of Religion** that “the godly consideration of our election in Christ is full of sweet, pleasant and unspeakable comfort.”

Reading II: Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19 (long form); 11:1-2, 8-12 (short form)

The eleventh chapter of the letter to the Hebrews is sometimes called “the roll call of the heroes of faith.”

Yet, strictly speaking, the Bible knows no heroes, for heroes are witnesses to their own achievements, whereas in Hebrews 11 the great figures of salvation history are brought forth, not for their heroism, but for their “faith,” which, in the author’s thought, is closely linked with hope.

Faith is taking God at his word when he makes promises for the future. Thus, the Old Testament figures become examples for the new Israel, the new wandering people of God.

The new people has also in each succeeding generation had to imitate Abraham who “went out, not knowing where he was to go,” and his family, who lived in tents because they had no abiding city here, but “looked forward to the city which has foundations.”

Gospel: Luke 12:32-48 or 12:35-40

The core of this section of Luke is the parable of the waiting servants (Lk 12:35-38). There is a remarkable convergence between the first reading and this gospel, for in its Lucan form the original parable of the doorkeeper (see Mk 13) has been expanded with elements taken from the Christian paschal feast: “Let your loins be girded [see Ex 12:11] and your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home.”

The early Christians literally believed that the return of their Lord would take place at the Passover, as the first Israel believed that the Messiah would come that night.

When the Christ did not return literally at midnight, the Church celebrated the agape-Eucharist, in which he came in advance of his final coming. So the promise was fulfilled: “He will gird himself and have them sit at table and he will come and serve them.”

Every Eucharist, especially every Sunday Eucharist, is a reflection of the paschal Eucharist, and so the same promise is fulfilled here, too.

At the same time, the essential attitude enjoined upon the disciples— “Watch”— is a counterpart of the attitude inculcated in the second reading—the attitude of a faith that is prepared to go out, not knowing where it is to go.

Both speak in different ways of that readiness to be on the move, not to get bogged down in false securities on the assumption that we have here an abiding city.

Reginald H. Fuller