

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 11, 2019
Reflection by Sister Belinda Monahan, OSB
WIS 18:6-9; HEB 11:1-2, 8-19; LK 12:32-48

Sister Pat Coughlin's guidelines for these reflections asks three questions, "What? So what? What now?" Usually the readings lead us to a new, more nuanced understanding of Jesus, or ourselves, or the world, and that new understanding leads to action--to a different way of living in the world. Today's readings, however, are not about our heads--the way we understand Jesus, or our hands--the way we live out that understanding and more about our hearts. Instead they speak to that necessary link between our heads and our hands, they speak to our hearts and the faith that allows us to live out our lives as Christian believers.

All three readings are focused on this theme of faith--although the word only appears in the first two readings. In all of them, faith is directly linked with waiting. But faith is more than merely passive waiting--it also entails belief. Belief in the promises of God and willingness to live out of that belief--to allow it to change our very persons. That belief is not the same as agreeing with facts--it's not something we do with our heads. While it may arise from action and almost certainly leads to new behavior, faith is also not exclusively about our hands. What the readings today teach us is that faith is an attitude of the heart.

In the first reading, the Jewish people await "the salvation of the just and the destruction of their foes." Recognizing they cannot bring this about themselves,

while they wait, they offer sacrifices--they live in accord with God's command.

Abraham awaits "descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore." His faith--his belief that the promises of God were trustworthy was sufficient that he believed that even if he couldn't see the way forward--how could God provide descendants if he killed his only son? --God could and would fulfill the promise; even when it seems most unlikely.

The servants in the Gospel too are waiting for the return of their master. As they wait, they gird their loins and light their lamps" --they prepare for work, apparently work that will last well past dark--but the only work they do is to open the door. Once the master arrives home, HE does the work--waiting on the servants--a scene which is almost utterly absurd. What kind of master would wait on his servants? But isn't that why we're gathered here today, to be served by God at this table of God? And to be changed by the God whom we encounter here?

So, what now? Most of us are, I suspect, already pretty good about striving to understand with our heads what God is asking of us and taking action out of that understanding with our hands. Today's readings call us to spend time with the link between them--our heart. To deepen the faith in Jesus that will allow us to understand and act more deeply in accord with God's will for us.