

August 7, 2022

Wisdom 18:6-9
Psalm 33
Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19
Luke 12:32-48

Have you ever been asked, “What is your passion?” It is a very simple question, but when answered honestly, it can be very informative. Our passions reveal much about who we are and about what is important to us. If, by chance, you have never been asked that question before, you have now. In today’s Gospel, when Jesus says to his disciples, “...where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.” he is in effect asking each of us, “What is your passion?”

A few weeks ago, Betty and I were spending an afternoon with two of our grandchildren, a girl and a boy, ages seven and eight. They were playing together, but they were also getting on each other’s nerves. I lost count of the number of times that afternoon that I heard one or the other say, “Stop it!” Finally, I had heard all the bickering I could stand. I slapped my hand against my leg and said, “That’s enough! Move apart and stay apart.” They promptly obeyed, but I felt like a heel for having lost my cool. A little later I remembered that I needed to have one of our vehicles inspected, and I asked my grandson to go with me to the mechanic’s shop. He agreed to go, although I don’t think either of them wanted to be near me at the point. In the shop’s waiting area, there was a bowl of miniature Tootsie-Roll Pops and a foosball table. So, while the vehicle was being inspected, my grandson and I played foosball – with Tootsie-Roll Pops stuck in our mouths. As we were leaving, he asked if he could take another Tootsie-Roll Pop from the bowl. I thought to myself, they are small, so why not let him have another one. But before I could answer, he added, “...for my sister.” Well, I almost lost it again, in an entirely different way and for an entirely different reason. I cannot know for certain what is in my grandson’s heart

but by revealing this passion for his sister, he showed me where his treasure is, and he gave me a pretty good idea of what is in his heart, at least for now.

So, what is my passion? Where is my treasure? What is in my heart? These are important questions that each one of us should be asking ourselves regularly. Today’s Gospel begins with Jesus saying to his disciples, “Do not be afraid any longer...” He goes on to explain that the treasures that they (and we) fear losing – our money, our possessions, and even our lives – are only temporary. He encourages us to give them away – to sell our possessions and give our money to the poor. The only lasting treasure, Jesus says, is the Kingdom of Heaven, which the Father is pleased to give us. That is where our passions should lie. That is where our hearts should be. The remainder of this Gospel is a parable about servants awaiting their master’s return from a wedding. With this parable Jesus admonishes us, in no uncertain terms, to be vigilant and prepared to receive the gift of the Kingdom. Parts of this parable may be difficult to hear, especially the punishment of the servant who was left in charge of other servants and mistreated them. Jesus uses that harsh image to illustrate the last verse of this reading, “Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.” Discipleship is demanding. As Christians, we have been entrusted with the keys of the Kingdom. We have a solemn responsibility to be good stewards of those keys, to begin building the Kingdom now, and to help others find their way to the Kingdom. The parable also promises that for those whom the master finds vigilant and prepared for the Kingdom, “he will gird himself, have them recline at table, and proceed to wait on them.” The master is modeling the behavior of a true leader – to care for the needs of others.

I wonder if I lost anyone when I quoted from today’s Gospel that we should sell our

possessions and give our money to the poor. Was Jesus being serious? How can we survive? What does that mean in our world today? First and foremost, it means that we must have faith. In the verses immediately preceding today's Gospel, Jesus assures his disciples that the Father knows and cares for all our needs. Do we really believe that? In one of our more popular contemporary hymns we sing, "God will provide for all that we need here at the table of plenty." Those are not just comforting words made up by a talented composer. They are visionary words rooted in the promises of Holy Scripture. Our second reading today is taken from a longer passage about faith and endurance in the Letter to the Hebrews. Abraham and Sarah are presented as examples of profound faith. Abraham trusted God's word that they would have countless descendants and receive a heavenly inheritance. At God's command they left their homeland and lived the rest of their lives as aliens in a strange land. Through many challenges and hardships, they kept their faith and never looked back. Their trust in God endured far beyond logic and common sense, and for that, Abraham is revered as a father by many generations of Christians, Jews, and Muslims. We too can follow Abraham's lead, leaving behind our fears, preconceived ideas, and anything else that may hinder authentic faith, and allow God to provide for our needs.

In addition to having faith, we must also align our passions with God's passions. We see repeatedly in Holy Scripture that God's heart is with the little ones – the orphan, the sick, the stranger, the widow, and others living on the margins of society. Jesus embraced these little ones as heirs of the kingdom. In his Sermon on the Plain, Jesus said, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God." When we make today's little ones our passion, and when we remember, as Pope Francis says, that everything is a gift, we might become a little more inclined to let go of our fears, sell our possessions, and give our money to the poor.