

## Homily 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year C

“Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.” Dearly beloved in Christ, these words call for faith, hope and trust in God. They remind us of the words proclaimed by the Holy Father of blessed memory, Pope John Paul II, at the beginning of his pontificate: “Do not be afraid! ... Do not be afraid to open the doors of your hearts to Christ.” This calls for an unflinching faith and confidence in the power of God to deliver and to save.

I will never forget the experience I had at Otulu village, in Nigeria, during one of my evangelization outreach exploits. We were visiting homes randomly and entered a home where we encountered a woman who was grieving the death of her only child. After offering our condolences and prayers, we tried to lead her to yield to God’s will, using a popular prayer of self consecration *which she was requested to repeat each time*: “Jesus, I love you [*She repeated*]; all have is thine [*She repeated*]. Yours I am and yours I want to be [*she repeated*]; do with me whatever you will [*She was mute and would not say it*]”. We tried to encourage her to say it but without success. When we pushed further, she looked at us straight in the eyes and protested, “Supposing He [God] kills me too?” What a poor understanding! What a shallow trust in God!

In the First Reading (Wisdom 18:6-9), we see faith in action. We see that “the night of the Passover was known beforehand to our fathers, that with sure knowledge of the oaths in which they put their faith, they might have courage.” What does this mean? It means that God commanded them to celebrate the Passover, the feast of their liberation from Egyptian domination, even before it took place. Beloved, God counts His chicken before they are hatched. Thus, faith was at work because they celebrated their freedom before it happened. Hence the Author to the Hebrews, from the experience of the people of Israel articulated the definition of faith in our Second Reading today (Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19) as “the assurances of things hoped for.... the conviction of things not seen.”

That very night, after the Passover, the people of Israel marched into freedom. The question, then, is “How did they have that assuredness that after the last plague, Pharaoh would yield to divine pressure and let them go?” Consider that many plagues had taken place already: the attack of flies, the attack of locusts, the attack of frogs, the Nile water turned red, and all the rest, Pharaoh’s heart remained hardened all along. How did they believe that this final one would be the last

straw? How did they realize that it would be the moment of moments? Faith was involved. Our fathers of old put their faith in God and were not disappointed.

As we can see, therefore, faith is not empty or vain. It is journeying with God; we do not walk alone; we walk with God. One of our Catholic Hymns recounts this journey in these words, “Be not afraid, I go before you always, come follow me; and I will give you rest.” Abraham, Moses and all those who met with God’s favor journeyed with God and gained their victory and peace. Thus faith, founded on God, is real and justifiable through real events in our relationship with God. Hence, the catechism says, “We do not believe in formulas but in those realities they express, which faith allows us to touch” (CCC 170).

Applied to the Eucharist, the New Passover, the Church teaches that “the Eucharist is the foretaste of our eternal glory.” Here we see the importance of the Sacrifice of the Holy Mass in our faith journey. It helps us to appreciate our Catholic faith and to be proud of it. Through the Eucharist, we celebrate our freedom in advance; the freedom from sin and the Devil and our final blessedness in heaven. Though it may not seem feasible to many people who do not understand the meaning of the Mass, the Mass is our New Passover celebration of our future ultimate freedom.

Beloved, the point of the Gospel is that our hope for this future glory must be concretized through proper stewardship in the here and now. The Passover and the Mass are sacrificial celebrations; there is no “blanket salvation.” The Israelites made enormous sacrifices before they entered the Promised Land. Christ made an inestimable sacrifice before he entered his glory. We are called to make sacrifices. To this end, God summons us to be faithful and prudent stewards of God’s blessings. What you have is not exclusively your own. “The Master [puts you] in charge of his servants to distribute the food allowance at the proper time.”

On the whole, this means that sharing is obligatory: “Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.” But if one becomes self-centered and treats the gifts of time, talent and treasure exclusively for one’s selfish use only, and begins to ignore the needs of the Church, the poor and suffering, look down on others; “eats and drinks and get drunk, then that servant’s master [Jesus Christ] will come on an unexpected day ... punish him severely and assign him a place with the unfaithful [Hell].” Finally, do not be afraid to trust in God! Do not be afraid to share! Above all, celebrate the Mass with faith that your eternal redemption is assured!