

Proper 14C 2019 SSP

St. Luke 12:32-40 “Everlasting Purses and Constant Prayer”

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

As we have been saying for most of the Gospel readings this summer, Saint Luke narrates episodes set within the context of Jesus’s journey up to Jerusalem; that is, his journey towards his confrontation with the religious and political authorities there, his condemnation by them, and his consequent crucifixion and death. Jesus had been predicting this, and his disciples, beginning with Peter at the lead, did not want to hear it. Jesus had also said that after three days he would be raised from the dead, but since the disciples couldn’t bear to hear about his death, they couldn’t hear about his resurrection either.

Saint Luke of course is writing his Gospel from this side of Christ’s death and resurrection, this side of his empty tomb and subsequent appearances to his astounded disciples. The Evangelist therefore sees that Jesus’s journey up to Jerusalem was not only foreseen by Jesus, it was his life’s mission and work. Further, Jesus’s death and resurrection were God’s plan from the beginning, to redeem his errant children from their sins and to re-incorporate them into his life within the Body of Christ.

What we do here, week after week, even day after day at Saint Stephen’s, when we set forth the Holy Eucharist, is to display, in these outward and visible signs, this plan of redemption. We offer it, we celebrate and consecrate it, we receive it, and thereby show the ongoing life of the Body of Christ. So when we hear Jesus in today’s Gospel, making his way up to Jerusalem for his approaching Sacrifice, we need to hear him through the redemptive filter, see him through the redemptive lens, that Saint Luke offers his fellow believers in the church, then and now.

Today we hear Jesus telling his followers not to fear. Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's pleasure to give you the kingdom. And then he counsels us on two things. The first is to have "purses" that do not grow old or fall apart, cannot be stolen or in any way taken from us. The second is that we are to be ready, for we know not the moment when Jesus will come and summon us. Jesus is building on the words we heard last week which culminated in his little Parable of the Rich Fool.

The Rich Fool did exactly what Jesus warned against. He had enormous "purses" which could grow old, fall apart, and be taken away. And he was by no means ready for a visitation from God. Just as he put his feet up and comforted himself on his material security, God said, "Fool, your soul is required of you tonight. And all these things of yours, whose will they be?" So it is, said Jesus, when we are not "rich towards God."

So today Jesus goes further. The purses that do not wear out and cannot be stolen away are the things that stem from love. God is love. He has shown himself to be Love by planning always to send Jesus to reveal himself to us and save us. Having a loving relationship with God and with God's children builds up the purse that Jesus is speaking of. This relationship opens up our heart and mind and will to think, say and do the works of love. It prompts us to thankfulness for the life and time we are given. It moves us to joy and reverence concerning God's world we are placed in. It influences us to be generous to others in every way that it possible to be generous: to listen, to bless, to forgive, to do acts of kindness. It restrains us in temptations to envy, to arrogance, to prejudice and judgment, to lust and anger, to fear and greed.

In one immortal sentence, Jesus describes the issue concerning purses that do not grow old versus purses that do and can be stolen or removed: "Where your treasure is, there will your

heart be also.” Where do we want our hearts to be fixed? On things that are impermanent and pass away, or on things that abide, even unto eternity?

Now what about the second part of Jesus’s counsel today, that we are to be ready for the summons, for God’s visitation? Jesus uses images of servants keeping awake, of being clothed in readiness, prepared for their master’s arrival at any hour, whether it be midnight or the middle of the day. I believe the answer to this is prayer.

By prayer I do not mean just particular said or recited or memorized prayers, beloved and helpful as they are. I do not just mean liturgical and corporate prayer, even prayers like this Blessed Sacrament of the Mass, essential as it is to our lives and the life of the Church. I mean an entire disposition of the soul of which these prayers are part. Saint Paul says “pray constantly.” He doesn’t mean repeat prayers constantly, useful as they are. He means to allow our spirits in every situation to be open to and in a kind of conversation with, the Spirit of God. God, the loving and self-sacrificing Father, Son and Holy Spirit, has shown he is constantly open to us, and if we respond in kind, we are beginning to pray constantly, no matter what time or place we are in. In trial and tribulation, in joy and thanksgiving, we can be in prayer. Why worry, said a wise woman, when you can pray?

The person in this disposition, whose spirit is in ongoing communion with God’s Spirit no matter what the circumstance, is the servant whose loins are girded and is ready for the master’s appearance. Prayer is living faith in moment-by-moment conversation with the Lord whom we love and believe. And so it is that by prayerful readiness, we can say “Guide us waking, Lord, and guard us sleeping; that awake we may walk with Christ and asleep we may rest in peace.”

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.