

THE EMMAUS SERIES

19th Sunday Year C

Wisdom 18:6-9

Hebrews 11:1-2; 8-19

Luke 12:32-48

Fear not, little flock, it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom

The central chapters of Luke's gospel, as we have seen, present the instructions of Jesus to his disciples, as he makes his final journey to Jerusalem. Luke preserves this teaching as a legacy for disciples of all ages. Our readings will be from this section until the Church's year has almost ended.

Today's gospel passage follows on from teaching concerning a right attitude to this world's possessions: 'Get yourself treasure that will not fail you'. What has gone before serves as an introduction to the theme of hope. Christian hope is very fundamental in the lives of those who are true followers of Jesus. Hope - one of the 'three theological virtues' (fundamental to our relationship with God; cf. 1 Cor 13:13) - is little appreciated by many of our people, whose faith is often too individualistic. Because they are not familiar with the great story unfolding in the Scriptures, their faith awareness does not include an eager longing for the final achievement of God in the divine plan for the whole of creation. Christian hope is the certainty that, despite all appearance to the contrary, God's final reign will come: 'Fear not, little flock, it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom'. This certainty is essential to a vital faith, the second reading tells us: 'only faith can guarantee the blessings we hope for, or prove the existence of the realities that at present remain unseen'.

Believing that God's final achievement had been realised in the Saviour's resurrection, the first Christians looked forward to his imminent return. With the passing of time, their faith had to adjust to an indefinite time of waiting. Luke's presentation of Christ's teaching reflects this. Faithful disciples will prepare for their final meeting with the Lord by giving themselves to the things of daily life. They will be judged according to their faithfulness and generosity in doing this. At the same time, however long the period of waiting may be, they must have an attitude of readiness and hope – in the 'third watch' the night is almost over and the dawn is coming. When the Lord does come, the fulfilment of their hope will exceed all their expectations and imaginings: the Lord himself 'will put on an apron, sit them down at table and wait on them' – a magnificent image, combining the eschatological banquet looked forward to by the prophets, and the 'Servant' theme of the late Isaian writings with which Jesus identified: 'the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mt 20:28).

Today, we begin a series of reading from the concluding section of the letter to the Hebrews. The theme of hope is strong in this letter, written to encourage converts from Judaism who are nostalgic for their old ways. They are reminded of the great plan of God, and of faith's 'guarantee of realities that at present remain unseen' – reminded that Abraham himself lived as 'a stranger and nomad - longing for a better homeland, a heavenly homeland'.

John Thornhill sm