

Our hearts must be with Jesus, our treasure

Homily by Bishop Samuel J. Aquila, D.D.
August 8, 2004 -- 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

The great question that is given to us in our readings for this weekend is “Where is our treasure and what do we treasure most?”

Jesus within the Gospel speaks the words, “For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.” For those of us who are people of faith, we are called to reflect upon that treasure as to where our treasure truly is. This morning I want to reflect with you on faith, on obedience, and on readiness.

First -- faith: In the second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews we hear the words, “Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen.” The gift of faith is given to us by our God. We put our faith in the promises that our God has given to us. The One who made the promise is trustworthy. We trust in what God has revealed to us; there is trust and confidence in His words to us.

In the first reading from the book of Wisdom, we hear of the confidence that the people had at the time of the Passover. They slaughtered the lambs and put blood on their doors so that the angel of death would pass by. They trusted that God’s promises to them would be fulfilled; that He would lead them out of their slavery in Egypt. We see the same in Abraham. Abraham was so confident of God’s promises to him that he left his home land, went into the Promised Land and wandered, having great confidence that God would be faithful to him. Then God gives him the promise, “I will make you the father of a multitude of nations.” Abraham thinks, “How is this possible? I am old. My wife is sterile. She is unable to conceive for she is past the age.” But again he trusts and has confidence in the promises of God, and Isaac is born.

God goes so far as to test Abraham’s faith and trust in him by asking him to sacrifice Isaac -- his only son, his only child, the only one who could fulfill the promises that God had given to him. Abraham has tremendous confidence. He is obedient. As they are journeying toward the place of sacrifice where Abraham is going to have to sacrifice his son, Isaac, to God, Isaac asks Abraham, “Where father is the sacrifice?” Abraham trusts and has the confidence to say, “God will provide the sacrifice.” He may not fully understand, he may not fully comprehend, but he trusts that God is a faithful God.

We as a people live on the other side of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The people of the Old Testament never saw the complete fulfillment of the promises of God. From generation to generation they awaited the coming of the Messiah. We as a Catholic people today live in the fulfillment of the promise. We are much more blessed than the people of the old covenant. That is why Jesus within the Gospel will speak the words, “Your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.” The kingdom is already in our midst and as people of faith we are called to place our trust in God, to place our trust in His Word, Jesus Christ. For we see within Jesus the fulfillment of all the promises given to us. Jesus is the only treasure that you and I are called to have. He is our true treasure. He is the homeland to which all of us are journeying.

The second point -- obedience: Obedience means living and trusting in that faith no matter what the cost. We see obedience in Abraham who leaves everything, who is even willing to surrender Isaac to God. He trusts and is obedient no matter what the cost. We see obedience in Mary, the Mother of God. She does not fully understand the message of the angel, but she trusts the words of the angel to her -- that “nothing is impossible with God.” Mary responds, “I am the servant of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word” -- words of radical obedience. We see obedience in the martyrs of the Church who are willing to lay down their lives, to give themselves because of their faith in Jesus Christ. They obeyed, no matter what the cost, even the cost of their lives.

We, too, are called to the same obedience today -- an obedience no different from that of Abraham and Sarah, an obedience no different from that of Moses, the prophets, Mary, Joseph, or the martyrs of the Church.

We, too, are called to be obedient to the Word of God, to listen to it and to put it into practice. Jesus speaks of that when he speaks to Peter. Peter raises the question "Lord, is this parable meant for us or for everyone?" The Lord makes clear it is meant for everyone -- and meant most especially for those who serve, for those who are entrusted with much.

When I read this Gospel, as a Bishop, those words spoken to Peter speak to my heart. Jesus concludes with the statement, "Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more." Those words must be taken seriously as Jesus entrusts to me his Bishop, his Apostle, the care of my flock, the care of His flock.

In every walk of life we must take those words seriously. For those of you who are parents, Jesus has entrusted to each one of you newborn life. He has made you co-creators with Him in the gift of life. Much is expected of you by our God in forming your children in the faith, in handing on that gift of faith. We are not to find excuses, but rather we are to be obedient, no matter what the cost. We must be willing to embrace the cross -- the willingness to go to the cross, not out of some form of punishment, not out of some desire for pain, but to go to the cross for love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We embrace the cross out of obedience, the obedience of love, because we are faithful to our God -- a God who is totally faithful to us. Our motivation must always be charity and living faithfully in that love, that radical obedience to love as Jesus himself loved.

Let us turn to the third point -- readiness. Our Lord tells us that we are always to be ready. In the Gospel reading, He speaks the words, "Gird your loins and light your lamps and be like servants who await their master's return from a wedding, ready to open immediately when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival."

My dearest sisters and brothers, we are called to always be ready to witness to Jesus Christ, to be those whose lives are always ready to encounter the Lord -- whether that encounter be with our husbands or wives or with our children, whether that encounter be with the hungry or the homeless, whether that encounter be in the classroom as we teach or in the nursing home as we visit the sick. "Whatever you did for one of these least, you did for me."

We are called to open our eyes and to always be ready to meet Jesus Christ. That, too, means being ready for our own personal death. There is not one of us here who can guarantee absolutely that we will wake up tomorrow morning. How do we live our lives? Are we always ready to meet our God?

Most of us live our lives from day to day thinking, "Well, today is not the day." We always plan way ahead into the future. I can still remember the day that I walked out of the doctor's office with my mother, when she was told that she had maybe five months to live. They had found cancer in her brain, in her liver, and in her lungs, yet she looked perfectly healthy. She looked at me and said, "You know this isn't the way I planned my life. I'm only 74 years old. I planned on living till at least 80 or more." All I could respond is, "At times God's plans are not our plans."

We as people must always be ready to meet God. We must always be ready to encounter the Lord and always be prepared, because our true homeland is not here on earth. It is in Heaven. It is Jesus Christ. He is our true homeland. Everything on this earth will pass away, absolutely everything. The only thing that will remain is Jesus Christ and our life with him in Heaven -- the things of eternity. All else will pass.

So as we continue with our celebration of the Eucharist this morning, and especially as we receive holy communion, I encourage us to pray for a deeper faith -- a deeper faith in our God who is trustworthy, faith in the promises given to us by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Let us pray that the Lord will grant

to us the faith of Abraham, the faith of Mary, the faith of the saints. Pray for a deeper faith and ask the Lord, "Increase my faith each day in you, who are faithful to your promises."

Second, let us also pray for the grace of obedience, the grace of obedience to respond to the word of God, to the words that Jesus has given to us, to the words in which we hear, "he learned obedience by what he suffered" -- a suffering love to do the will of the Father.

My sisters and brothers, as we pray the Our Father today, meditate upon the words, "Thy will be done,"... "Thy will be done," -- not mine, not his, not hers -- **your** will, Father, be done. Let us pray for the obedience of all those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith, for the obedience of Mary in which she said, "I am the servant of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word." Let us hunger and long for that obedience.

Finally, let us also reflect during the course of the week on our own readiness to encounter the Lord. Whether it be in the little things in life, or whether it be on the day of our own death -- consider, "How ready am I to meet the Lord?" Let us ask the Lord to help us to always be ready. Then we will know truly where our treasure lies -- that it is with Jesus Christ. "For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be." May each one of our hearts be with Jesus Christ -- joined to the heart of the Trinity in love, with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.