

2022 19<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, C

THE CHALLENGE OF FAITHFULNESS

*"You too must stand ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not know" (Lk. 12: 40)*

***The Story of a Faithful Catechist:*** Growing up I knew a Catechist in our parish who was very committed, dedicated, and selfless in service to God, the priests, and the Church. He would wake up very early to open the Church, ring the Church bell to announce the dawning of the day and calling the people to prayer. He would return after 30 minutes to ring that last gong informing the community that it was five minutes before the Morning Prayer would start. He did this every day, rain, or shine, in winter and in summer. He was there for the prayers, often alone in the Church, he would recite all the prayers, take all the Readings for the day, and would even preach to the empty pews. He would sing and pray as though there was a congregation with him. He was glad when there was anyone and undeterred when no one turned up. He would visit the sick in the community, Catholic and non-Catholic. He would prepare people for the sacraments, teaching catechism to children and adults preparing for marriage. He was a tall slender man with a frail frame. He was not wealthy in the eyes of the world, but his house was a home to the poor and the rich. In St. Paul's words, he was "all things to all men" (1 Cor. 9: 22). He has always been a model of faithfulness for me, and many people who knew him. On this 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, when the Church invites us to reflect on the theme of faithfulness, the image of this selfless Catechist dominantly comes to mind as one indisputable icon of faithfulness I was privileged to encounter.

***The Challenge of Our Forebears in Faith:*** To be faithful is to be loyal, trustworthy, committed, steadfast dedicated, dutiful, and devoted. Within the religious context, one who is faithful is one who believes in God with childlike trust and dependence; a person who is undaunted and unflinching in his stance in the best and the worst moments of his life. A woman of faith draws strength even from the worst conditions of her life believing that God has good plans and the ultimate answer in her situations. St. Paul says: "For those who love God, all things work together on to good, according to His purpose" (Rom. 8: 28). We see these qualities idealised in the Readings of today's Mass. The First Reading (Wisdom 18: 6-9) recalls the faithfulness of the Jewish ancestors, who had to wait courageously for centuries before God's promise of deliverance was fulfilled in Egypt. The final fulfilment came with Christ at the Last Supper sealed

on the Cross of Calvary. The Second Reading (Heb. 11: 1-2, 8-19) praises the faithfulness of Abraham, who, in uncomplaining manner, waited for the Lord's promise of making him into a generation of descendants that could not be counted, "as many as the stars of heaven or the grains of sand on the seashore" (Heb. 11: 12). This was fulfilled, not in his lifetime with Isaac, not with the nation of Israel, not at the Death and Resurrection of Christ, but at Pentecost, at the Birth of the Church that continues to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 18: 19-20).

***The Parable:*** Jesus, using the Parable of the Watchful Servant, elucidates on what it means to be faithful in the practical sense of the word. This parable delivers its message in reference to the Second Coming of the Lord. It is intended for us to sift its implications and importance in relation to our lives as Christians waiting for the Parousia. This is clearly stated when Jesus said: "You too must stand ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour you do not expect" (Lk. 12: 40). This is where the real challenge lies, that the servant has no idea when the master is returning. There is an inherent temptation in this situation to be careless, to relax and be loose. This is the reason Jesus comes with the warning: "See that you are dressed for action and have your lamps lit. Be like a man waiting for their master to return from the wedding feast, ready to open the door as soon as he comes and knocks" (Lk. 12: 35-36). Here faithfulness implies watchfulness, alertness, and wakefulness while waiting for the return of the master, the Coming of the Son of Man. To be faithful is to be found at our duty post, not just when the master returns, but constantly always, even now. Every day, the master comes to us in different ways – in the little needs of our neighbours, in the beckoning of the Church for volunteers, in the face of injustice around us. These are situations through which God invites us to shine our light.

***My dear friends,*** the image of the "lamps lit" is that of maintaining our Christian ethos and values and practices and living experience. In the world of today, where to be good means to be liberal, and being virtuous means doing what others are doing or simply going with the flow, it becomes pertinent, if not difficult for us to live out the demands of the gospel for fear of being antagonised or being called intolerant. Faith and faithfulness today call us to live a life that is not conformed to the standards of the world but by our lives transform the people and the world around us (Rom. 12: 2). To be faithful is to preserve the life of Christ and persevere in the love of Christ, especially in the most difficult times. When we remain constant, then that Day will not overtake us like a thief (1 Thess. 5: 4).