

HOMILY FOR JUBILEE 2019 ... EILEEN SCHULLER. o.s.u.

I am grateful to the Jubilarians for the invitation to share a few reflections on the readings from Scripture and from St. Angela that we have just heard.

I suddenly realized the other night that a significant portion of our community is celebrating today. When we include Sister Eva – who is certainly joining us from above – over 15% of our community are marking a Jubilee of 80, 75, 70, 65, or 60 years today. Truly this is a reason for rejoicing! As we look around at our Jubilarians gathered together here – and include Sr. Rita in Xavier Wing and Sr. Eva above – we are “indeed surrounded by a cloud of witnesses.” When we follow the passage we heard in the Letter to the Hebrews to its conclusion in chapter 12, we read: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that easily distracts us let us look to Jesus, the one who has already gone before us, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him, endured the cross and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

As always when we gather in this place for liturgy, even on a specific occasion like this, we do so as part of the universal church. The words of Scripture that we have heard have been given to us in the Lectionary, and are read today not only in all Catholic churches but also by many of our brothers and sisters in Anglican, Lutheran, United, many traditions who also follow the Lectionary. Yet this morning these words of the Epistle and the Gospel are new; they speak to us and we hear them in a specific way both because today is Jubilee and because they have been introduced and framed by the reading from our Constitutions, a passage that was chosen by the Jubilarians.

Three words stand out for me: faith, treasure and waiting. The three are interwoven so as to offer us both assurance and challenge. The Letter to the Hebrews begins by proposing a broad definition, almost a philosophical statement about faith: “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11: 1). This is a lovely, oft-quoted statement, but in fact the Greek here is quite abstract and complicated, and the precise nuance of some of these words is far from certain. Perhaps that is why the author moves quickly from attempting to define faith to giving us examples of those who have lived it. The verses that we just heard focus on Abraham and Sarah. But Abraham and Sarah are only a small part of a long list (and I encourage you to go back and read all of Hebrews 11): Abel, Enoch, Noah, Isaac, and Moses, the people who passed through the Red Sea, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samuel, Jephthah, David and Samuel and we could continue the list: Eva, Angela Theresa, Patricia Anne, Rita, Frances, Jean, June, Shirley, Mary-Ellen, Elizabeth, Jane. “By faith ... they obeyed God when they were called (Hebrews 11:8a); “by faith, they set out, not knowing where they were going” (Hebrews 11:8b). Like Sarah, even in advanced years, we see them now bringing forth new life because, like Sarah, they “considered him faithful who had promised” (Hebrews 11:11). All of us learn what faith is; we nourish and sustain our own struggling faith by the example of others who live it. I suspect that many of us even as we sit here are now remembering specific times in our own lives, and in our life as a community, where one of the Jubilarians has been for us an example of faith. Perhaps we might want to name and share some of these moments with our sisters during the coming days, as we give thanks for their witness of faith.

There are so many ways, so many images from within the Bible itself that we can call upon when we try to talk about faith. One of these is the image that the Gospel passage for today presents: faith as a treasure – a treasure that cannot be destroyed, that is secure and enduring, that does not wear out, “the assurance of what is hoped for.” This treasure is what directs where our heart turns, what gives meaning and purpose to our existence, that for which we will sell everything, give up everything. Our Constitutions are so bold as to proclaim that *we have Jesus Christ as our one and only treasure*. This is why we, like Abraham and Sarah, can live by faith.

Yet these readings not only assure us, but also challenge us – by unabashedly proclaiming that this treasure is something that always lies beyond, that we do not fully possess, something for which we must wait. I admit that I often don’t know how to incorporate, how really to live this eschatological/end-time component of faith. It is so easy to make fun of and critique a simplistic “pie-in-the-sky” mentality; we caricature those who fail to be concerned with this world, with the reality of climate change, with all the pressing issues and struggles that surround us every day because they are concerned only with heaven and what is to come. Yet the fact remains: Abraham and Sarah died in faith without having received the promises; the Letter to the Hebrews calls them “strangers and foreigners on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13) since their ultimate homeland, their treasure, was a heavenly one. Likewise, there is something unfinished and unresolved in today’s Gospel parable. The master has not yet come; the slaves wait. Yet they are blessed/ “blessed are they,” not for what they are doing or have done, but precisely for staying alert, vigilant, trusting and waiting. The assurance that is given them is in the form of a lovely but unexpected picture that calls to mind the Last Supper: the image of the master fastening his belt, and inviting them-the slaves- to sit down, and he himself serving as they eat – a complete reversal of the normal order. In the Eucharist that we will now share, the Master does come; we sit down, and he comes and serves us – yet this is only a foretaste and a glimpse of that final banquet that lies ahead.

And so, on this Jubilee Day, we congratulate our Jubilarians. We give you thanks for the witness of faith that you have been to us. We assure you of our support and prayers as you continue on the journey and all of us, today and always, join with you “in joyful hope as we await the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,” our one and only treasure. Amen.