

Reflection for the Nineteenth Sunday of the Church's Year

“Sell your possessions and give alms. Get yourselves purses that do not wear out, treasure that will not fail you....for where your treasure is, there will be your heart also.” These words of Jesus at the start of today's gospel are a continuation of last Sunday's warning to *“be on your guard against avarice of any kind, for a man's life”* said Jesus *“is not made secure by what he owns, even when he has more than he needs.”* Following that warning Jesus told the parable of the rich man who decided to build bigger barns to store his bumper harvest only to die the night he conceived his selfish project. The instruction to *“sell your possessions and give arms”* and to *“get yourselves treasure that will not fail you”* take on added poignancy in the light of last Sunday's gospel as do his words today to *“be like men waiting for their master to return.....ready to open the door as soon as he comes and knocks.”*

When Jesus finishes speaking Peter asks a fascinating question: *“Lord”* he asks, *“do you mean this parable for us, or for everyone?”* Who is called to this simplicity of life, this detachment from material goods and wealth, to living as if every day might be your last on this earth? An elite? Or all and sundry? It is clear from Jesus' answer to Peter that it is all and sundry who are all called to *“selling possessions and giving alms”* to *“getting purses that do not wear out, treasure that will not fail.”* We all are called to be *“dressed for action and have our lamps lit”* to being as continuously attentive as people *“waiting for their master to return from the wedding feast.”* This isn't something asked only of a professional religious class but of all disciples and followers.

In our second reading from the letter to the Hebrews Abraham is presented as the great man of faith always *“dressed for action [with his] lamp lit”* ready to respond to every twist and turn of God's calling for him. Abraham, just like the man in last Sunday's gospel, was a very wealthy man but, unlike the avaricious and selfish rich man of last week, Abraham was willing to sacrifice everything in response to God's calling and will. He left his home behind *“without knowing where he was going”*; he arrived *“a foreigner in the promised Land”* and *“and lived there in tents”*; and he was ready to sacrifice his greatest treasure, *“his only Son”* Isaac, when God *“put him to the test.”* Abraham was not dazzled by the allure of riches or material comfort; he did not put himself first or rely on his fortune for his security. The letter to the Hebrews has presented Abraham as a role model for us, an exemplar for us to follow. So, like Abraham, let us *“get ourselves treasure in heaven”*, *“let us be dressed for action and have our lamps lit”* so that our Master's arrival will find us at *“our employment.”* and *“ready to open the door as soon as he comes and knocks.”*