

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Last Saturday evening the friars went out to dinner and it is our custom. We tried a new restaurant, Asian cuisine, and as part of the ambience, they had the Lawrence Welk show playing on the TV above the bar.

Makes perfect sense, right? Saturday night. Lawrence Welk. Who doesn't remember that?

Well, as it turns out, lots of people. Fred and Cyprian and I all had lots of stories to tell about watching Lawrence Welk on Saturday night. Savio and Ian had absolutely no idea what we were talking about. They didn't even know who Lawrence Welk was. And they are not alone. Many of you present here are in the same boat.

That's the way of things, isn't it? Some of us know about Lawrence Welk, and some of us know about Instagram. And we all are compelled to keep moving forward because very few things in life are going to persist beyond the span of a couple lifetimes.

Today's readings provide us with one element that makes that situation livable – faith.

Faith is the underlying theme in all the readings this week.

The Letter to the Hebrews gives us the well-known definition: "Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen."

The Book of Wisdom fleshes that out a bit by describing how the Israelites demonstrated their faith: They wore their running shoes to the Passover supper. That meal, the model of our Eucharist, was not planned to be a sit-down affair. Passover faith is a verb, not a noun.

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The Gospel today begins with Jesus telling his disciples to demonstrate their faith by giving everything away. He tells them to obey the dress code for the Passover by being ready to hit the road, ready to embrace changed circumstances.

I know as I get older, the tendency becomes stronger to want to put down deeper roots. Less travel, less moving, more emphasis on building up the connections I've already made. And I can make some excellent arguments for that approach, believe me.

But where I get caught is by readings like today's. Jesus is so insistent that we keep in view the facts of life—it's changing. So many of the things we hold dear are just not going to be there tomorrow. I don't really miss Lawrence Welk that much, but there are aspects of my life that I act like I can't do without—until I'm forced to.

Unless I'm carrying faith with me, those moments could undo me completely—like the woman who has to move from her home of 50 years to an assisted living facility. What to do with all that furniture?!

Or the man who retires and suddenly finds that he has a lot more time on his hands than he knows what to do with.

One thing seems certain: We can't put our faith in God expecting that he will keep us from ever having to make a change. We can't ask God to protect us from the contingencies of life any more than we can ask him to preserve us from the effects of gravity.

Our faith in God has to do with keeping us going forward toward the kingdom when the changes come.

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And come they will. Some we can already see. Some really will catch us off guard like a thief in the night. Will we be ready? Will we be able to continue to be faith-filled, to trust that God can lead us forward into freedom in spite of all the change?

We can if we practice. Some self-examination will help. What are the elements of our life that we're already inclined to put too much faith in? Can we pull back from them and recognize that they are not going to save us?

I encourage you to take that question to prayer. It could very well be that God will point out for you the things you are currently relying on that will not be able to deliver.

Better to make some needed adjustments now than when push comes to shove and we are caught unprepared.