

19th Sunday, 2007

1. Often times there will be documentaries on television about the immigrations to this country which took place in the 19th and early 20th centuries. We can see the men and women of those days with their children being processed at Ellis Island, the most famous of the ports of entry. How hard it must have been for these men and women to leave behind their familiar worlds. Most, I suspect, never saw their native land and parents again. And what they faced was the unknown: a new country, and for many of them, a new language as well. We can only begin to imagine what it must have been like for them--their fears, their anxieties, their loneliness. Yet they came. Why? Sometimes it was because the situation in their native countries was so desperate. The Irish who came in the 1840s were escaping the starvation which killed half the population of Ireland when the potato crop failed for three years. Earlier immigrants like the pilgrims in MA came seeking freedom from religious persecution. Later immigrants came looking for the opportunity to enjoy a better economic life. Thus the bottom line in all cases was the hope for a better life, religiously, economically, and in a thousand other ways, and making this journey across the Atlantic was an act of faith on their part in the reality of a better future for themselves and their children. That faith gave them the

strength to break with the familiar and venture out towards the unknown.

2. In today's second reading one man is presented as having done the same thing as these immigrants. His name of course was Abraham. He left his native land and became a foreigner in a new land. He believed that God would give him and his wife Sarah children even though they were beyond child-bearing age. And when they had the promised child Isaac, God tested Abraham by asking him to offer his son in sacrifice--a horrible practice which was often a part of ancient religions but was rejected by the Jews. But Abraham passed even that test.

3. For me the image which gives expression to Abraham's faith is that of the 18th and 19th immigrants to our country standing on the deck of the ships which took them to a new land and life. Standing at the back of the ship they watch the familiar sights of their native land begin to disappear from their view. Then they turn and walk to the front of the ship and face in the other direction, and all they see is an open ocean. Now they have to believe that one day on the distant horizon of that open ocean they will see land, a new land. They will see houses and people and the place where their new life would begin. And they stare at the open ocean with hope, with

faith, that all will be well with them one day in that new land, in that new world.

4. We take that image and apply it to our lives as believers. Each day we stand on the deck of our lives and look to the future which God promises us, and we believe in and hope in that future. We believe that all will be well for us because we are in the hands of our loving Father. And we entrust our lives to Him now. That is true for all of us, whatever our age may be, because for all of us the future is the same. It is the unknown. The only difference which age can make with respect to the future is that of prospects. When we are young we are faced with the prospect of future schooling, the choice of a spouse and the choice of career and job. When we are older we are faced with the prospect of retirement and ill health. To be sure, the possibility of ill health and death is part of everyone's future, not matter what our age, but it is normally a more immediate possibility for us who are older. But in all cases our attitude towards the future, whether we are young or old, must be the same: that of trust and hope in God's care for us. We must hope and trust that all will be well for us if we entrust ourselves to our Father's loving care.

5. If we wait for the future in this way, we will be ready when the Lord comes to us in his many different disguises, in the joys and trials which our future will bring. Indeed, the Gospel promises us that he will come and wait upon us. We will experience the Lord's hospitality as we find ourselves at home in his house.

6. Let us live in this way. Let us put our trust in God's love for us. Let us not be afraid or anxious. As the Lord says to us in today's Gospel: "Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your belongings and give alms. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven that no thief can reach nor moth destroy. For where you treasure is, there also will your heart be."