

As Christians, we have a divine calling, and God gives us a life on earth to understand it and respond to it in faith. Today we journey with the converted Jews in the book of Hebrews as they are coached on how to respond to this calling. Then we will consider the words of Jesus as he calls us to, "Gird our loins," to prepare for the master's arrival.

The USCCB calls these pages of Hebrews, "Among the most eloquent and lofty to be found in the Bible." The author, who may be Saint Paul, describes the persecution of these converts to Christianity in the previous chapter saying, "Remember the days past when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a great contest of suffering. At times you were publicly exposed to abuse and affliction. You even joined in the suffering of those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, knowing that you had a better and lasting possession."

The divine calling comes from a voice that is from out of this world. We see these early Christians accepting the call, willing to join God's kingdom, and courageously letting go of this world, their positions and their property, in hope of something greater in the next world.

All of this takes a GREAT leap of faith. The reading just prior to today's says, "My just one shall live by faith. We are not among those who draw back and perish, but among those who have faith and will possess life." The divine calling leads us to possess a new life, a life in Christ that leads to eternal life.

Chapter 11 of Hebrews is what Peter Kreeft calls, "The great roll call of the heroes of faith, the Christian Hall of Fame." 18 of the 40 verses in this chapter begin with the words, "By faith." Kreeft summarizes, "By faith. Abraham obeyed... By faith, the people crossed the Red Sea... By faith, the walls of Jericho fell down... Through faith, they conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, and stopped the mouths of lions." Most of this happened before the Son of God appeared on earth. WE have so many more examples of faith to draw from such as the works of the saints who've joined the hall of fame in the past two millennia.

Our reading today begins with the words, "Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen." Faith is what allows God to abide and work within the human race. Faith is what drives us to accept and act on our divine calling and results in true joy in our lives. Like the Hebrews, we are enlightened. But in accepting our calling we also make ourselves open to public criticism as they were. We live in a world that has become more hostile to Christians and our values, making the divine calling a daily challenge to accept.

This take us to the gospel where Jesus says, “Gird your loins and light your lamps, and be like servants who await their masters return, ready to open immediately when he comes and knocks.”

Since I was a child, attending mass at St Killian’s in Mission Viejo, I’ve always wondered what it means to, “Gird your loins.” I don’t want you to go your whole life wondering, so I did some research, and here’s what I found out.

First, we have to take ourselves back a couple thousand years when people didn’t have a closet full of clothes they could pick from depending on the activities of the day. They basically had one tunic and adjusted this single clothing item based on what they were called to do that day. When preparing to do battle or perform heavy labor they would, “Gird their loins.” Consider my alb as a tunic. Tunics are like dresses that drop somewhere below the knee and must be adjusted to free up the lower body for strenuous activities.

Girding your loins starts by hiking up the lower material towards the waist and forward, then pull it from the back and tying it together or tucking it into a belt. In the end, it looks a bit like a diaper, but it helped ancient people get ready for the business of the day.

Jesus is asking us to gird our loins, but we can think of it more like rolling up our sleeves to get to the business of our divine calling. This may be preparing to battle Satan and his temptations or could be in preparation for the spiritual heavy lifting of serving our Lord in ministry. Girding your loins could be preparing yourself to speak out and defend others when they are being bullied or mistreated, or it could be the preparation you need to mend a broken relationship.

Pope Leo, during his address this week talked about a similar reading where Jesus asked the apostles to prepare the Passover meal. He said, “Every effort patiently accepted, is a way to prepare a place where God can dwell. We can ask ourselves, then: what spaces in my life do I need to put in order, so that they are ready to receive the Lord? What does it mean for me today to “prepare”? Perhaps to renounce a demand, to stop waiting for others to change, to take the first step. Perhaps to listen more, to act less, or to learn how to trust in what has already been prepared.”

We are here today to respond to a divine calling. We ask for the Holy Spirit to come into our hearts, as we gird our loins, inspired by the heroes of our faith, and do God’s will in our lives, build up His kingdom, and follow the saints to a place with Him in heaven.