

Scripture Study

Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle C



Opening prayer

Isaiah 66:18-21

(Ps 117:1-2)

Hebrews 12:5-7,11-13

Luke 13:22-30

Overview of the Gospel:

- In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus continues his last, fateful journey toward Jerusalem, teaching both his disciples and those he meets along the way. Someone in the crowd asks him about the number of those who will be saved. Will they be few?
- While most Jews of the time assumed that as members of God's chosen people, they had a *right* to be saved, there was disagreement as to how far one had to stray to be excluded. There was general agreement that non-Jews would not be saved.
- Jesus shatters this narrow understanding of salvation in two ways. First, he reveals that no one will enter the Kingdom of God merely by the fact of being a member of the covenanted community. He pointedly used the word "strive" (verse 24), the Greek root of which denotes an *agonizing* struggle, like that of an athlete.
- Secondly, he makes it clear that not only may his listeners not find themselves sharing eternity with the revered Old Testament patriarchs and prophets (verse 28), but, amazingly, many *outside* of Israel will be included before some of them (verses 29-30). For us, this serves as both encouragement—and a warning.

Questions:

- What does it mean to be saved? Saved from *what*? Saved *for* what? (see Ephesians 2:1-10)
- In the First Reading, Isaiah is prophesying that many will come from every corner of the earth to become part of God's people. What made this possible (see Ephesians 2:11-22)? How has this been unfolded in history?
- In the Gospel Reading, what is the exact question that Jesus is asked (verse 23)? Does he answer it directly?
- What does the image of the narrow gate represent? According to Jesus, who will make it through the narrow gate and who won't (verse 30)?
- If God loves all people, why isn't the gate wider? Who are the ones outside? Why isn't "eating and drinking" (just being associated) with Jesus enough?
- What does Jesus mean by "evil doers" (verse 27)? In the end, will only a *few*, or *many* or *all* people be saved? Why?
- What kind of strength does it take to enter the narrow gate? How will you get the strength? Do you trust in and depend on God's grace and strength—or what? (see the Second Reading)

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 1696, 2611, 1036, 2092

Closing Prayer

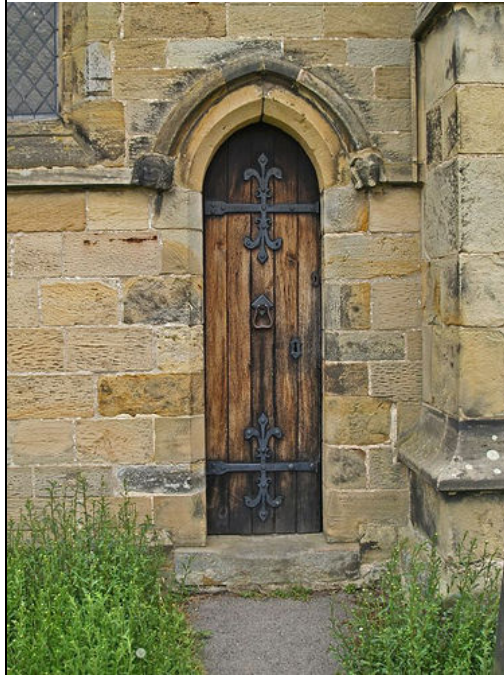
If men go to so much trouble and effort to live here a little longer, ought they not strive so much harder to live eternally? -St. Augustine

“Enter by the narrow door”

Scripture: *Luke 13:22-30*

He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. And some one said to him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" And he said to them, "Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the householder has risen up and shut the door, you will begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us.' He will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from.' Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from; depart from me, all you workers of iniquity!' There you will weep and gnash your teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves thrust out. And men will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

Meditation: What does the image of a door say to us about the kingdom of God? Jesus' story about the door being shut to those who come too late suggests they had offended their host and deserved to be excluded. It was customary for teachers in Jesus' time to close the door on tardy students and not allow them back



for a whole week in order to teach them a lesson in discipline and faithfulness. Jesus told this story in response to the question of who will make it to heaven. Many rabbis held that all Israel would be saved, except for a few blatant sinners who excluded themselves! After all, they were specially chosen by God when he established a covenant with them.

Jesus doesn't directly answer the question, however; but his response is nonetheless unsettling on two counts. First, Jesus surprised his listeners by saying that one's membership as a covenanted people does not automatically mean entry into the kingdom of God. Second, Jesus asserts that many from the gentile nations would enter God's kingdom. God's invitation is open to Jew and Gentile alike. But Jesus warns that we can be

excluded if we do not *strive to enter by the narrow door*. What did Jesus mean by this expression? The door which Jesus had in mind was himself. *I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved* (John 10:9). Jesus opens the way for us to enter into God's kingdom through the cross where he has laid down his life as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. If we want to enter and remain citizens of God's kingdom, then we must follow Jesus in the way of the cross. The word *strive* can also be translated *agony*. To enter the kingdom of God one must struggle against the forces of temptation to sin and whatever would hinder us from doing the will of God (even apathy, indifference, and compromise).

The good news is that we do not struggle alone. God is with us and his grace is sufficient! As we *strive side by side for the faith of the gospel* (Philippians 1:27) Jesus assures us of complete victory! Do you trust in God's grace and help, especially in times of testing and temptation?

"Lord Jesus, help me to always trust in your saving grace, especially when I am tempted and put to the test. Help me to be faithful to you and give me the courage and strength to resist temptation, especially the temptation to compromise or to be indifferent to your word."

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