

45 Twenty-first Sunday of Ordinary Time Year C      August 25, 2019  
Isaiah 66:18-21      Psalm 117      Hebrews 12:5-7,11-13      Luke 13:22-30

We have just heard in the Gospel the question that someone in the crowd is asking Jesus, "*Lord, will only a few be saved?*" Jesus does not answer the question because it is the wrong question to ask. Rather, the question that should have been asked is: "*How does a person attain salvation?*"

The question about how many will be saved has occurred to all of us at some time or other because there is no sure way of knowing who's in and who's out. It reflects our anxiety about getting to heaven and our own chance of making the grade. The mystery of salvation remains, to this day, an open question and Jesus leaves it in the hands of His followers who want to be saved.

Jesus is telling the Jews, and telling all of us gathered here around the Table of the Lord, that we cannot just sit back and take our salvation for granted and expect God to do everything for us. Gaining entry into heaven is not easy. Jesus says, *I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, No one can come to the Father except through Me.* There is one Gospel, one Christ, one cross, one Catholic Church Christ established, one narrow door. Jesus says, "*I am the gate*" (John 10:9).

Jesus tells a parable that if we want to make the journey to heaven, we will have to enter through the narrow door. The narrow door means going through Jesus and His Cross and actively living His Gospel message. To go through the narrow door means getting rid of baggage to enter, baggage like hatred, greed, jealousy, lust, anger, apathy, racism, self-centredness and pride. If we do not strive for holiness in the time we are given, the door may be closed when we get there.

We do not want to run the risk of ending up like many of the Jews, God's Chosen People, who counted themselves first and ended up last. Through our Baptism we are members of the new Chosen People. We are in a privileged position. We may now consider ourselves the "insiders."

However, God has *not* established any favourites and *nobody is on the inside track.* Our Lord says we can't claim the right to enter through the door because we ate and drank with Him, or because we bear His name, or because we are in His Church for one hour a week, or because we have heard His Words. No, these are not enough.

While Jesus did not sugarcoat the Gospel, neither did His words foretell dire consequences for all, only for those who ignore His instructions. Those who take Jesus' words to heart and are transformed into His image and living His Gospel will experience His salvation. Sometimes what Jesus says can make us tremble.

Yes, we can pray many prayers, sing many hymns, attend Sunday Mass, sit through tedious homilies. We must put the teaching and graces we received to live holy lives and build up the Kingdom of God. Jesus' question is about whether we were changed by all that. If not, Our Lord will say, "*I don't know you.*"

Jesus never beats around the bush when He describes the judgment all of us will face at the end of our lives. He uses vivid parables to help us understand and prepare for it. When we read about the closing of the *narrow door* on the day of judgment, it's easy to imagine the horror a person will feel on hearing Christ say: "*I do not know where you have come from: go away from me, all you evildoers!*"

Let us return to the question, "*How does a person attain salvation?*" The Catholic Church Christ established gives us the most effective way of preparing ourselves for the Kingdom. We have in our Church a reliable, Spirit-guided teaching authority of Christ. We have in the sacramental life of our Church seven places of Christ's assured presence. We have in our Church the gift of the Holy Eucharist that nourishes our hearts and minds. We have in our Church the Word of God spoken, preached and shared day in and day out. The issue is whether the wonderful opportunities we have in our Catholic Church are changing our lives and helping us enter the Kingdom.

The Word of God has to become explicit and concrete in our lives. We can begin at the Sunday Mass by listening to God's Word and putting His Word into action every day of our lives. Here at Mass we are invited to partake of the Holy Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ, which is the Meal of Eternal Life. The test of our Sunday worship is how we live at home with our families, how we live our faith at work, school and community, how we live our faith in our Church, and how we treat our neighbour during the week.

Besides eating this Meal of Eternal Life, each day we must love God, love our neighbour, and love ourselves. When we learn to love our brothers and sisters in Christ from our hearts, then we can forgive one another and show mercy to all people, thus

living in peace. We should pray regularly and live the Gospel every day. Each of us has been given unique talents to share the Word of God, to teach, to heal, to comfort, to do acts of mercy, to do justice, and to do ministry in our parish. Jesus asks whether you are using God's talents that were given to you?

Furthermore, we must resolve to overcome our sinful ways and go often to Confession, which is the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The people who live in serious sin and reject going to Confession could end up excluding themselves from eternal salvation. The only thing we take with us when we die is our sins, so it is important to try to go to Confession for the grace we will receive. Every person who lives in God's grace will die in God's grace.

One fact is clear; the door will not remain open indefinitely. One day when we least expect it, we will die. If we put our salvation *on the back burner*, then we may find salvation too late. Our salvation depends on our response *today*, not tomorrow. We must make following Christ our life's work, our goal to get through the *narrow door*. To be saved we must follow Jesus every second we live on earth.

After having heard today's Gospel about the narrow door, let us take time to reflect on our present commitment to Jesus' message. Let us truthfully ask ourselves this week whether our commitment to God's Kingdom is total and wholehearted, or is it just one of many things to do on a long list of our life's activities.

Today's Gospel reading carries some soul-searching challenges for each of us. Salvation is not a matter of just listening to God's Word but of following it and living it each and every day. Through following that Word, we will fit through the narrow door that, although narrow, is the portal to the wide-open spaces of God's life and love forever.

Rather than considering how many will enter the narrow door of the Kingdom, are we becoming fit for entry by our spiritual life? Are we using the opportunities and graces given to us in our Church and in the Sacraments? The answers to these questions lie in how you are living the virtues of your Catholic life today. Don't wait until it is too late.