

21ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE C

Isaiah 66: 18-21 + Psalm 117: 1-2 + Hebrews 12: 5-7, 11-13 + Luke 13: 22-30

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: August 25, 2019

“Lord, will only a few people be saved?”

Notice Jesus does not answer this question.

Salvation is not about numbers---how many are getting in?

Salvation is not about who gets in, because then we humans start doing the judging on who is worthy and who is not.

This Gospel passage challenges exclusive thinking, challenges religious elites and nationalists, as Jesus emphatically states that people of all nations and races will come to the feast at the banquet table in the Kingdom of God.

They will come from every direction, from every place on earth.

Even the people who are least respectable, who are the ones Jesus gets accused of associating with by the holier than thou folks

who judge and condemn him for the company he keeps.

The warning Jesus issues to the questioner is exclusive thinking and a judgmental attitude will lead one to be on the outside looking in.

The very mindset of separating out who is worthy or not puts one outside looking in, in danger of being locked out of the feast.

So Jesus' answer is basically, *“Pay attention to yourself.”*

You strive to enter through the narrow gate and stop wasting your energy judging others.

But what are we striving for?

We are striving to be like Jesus, to make his values our own.

Jesus comes from a heart set on God that cooperates with the divine Spirit to love all people, regardless of race, creed, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.

Jesus loves God his Father with every cell in his body, and he pours out his life in love of his neighbor.

It is not easy to center our life on love of God and love of neighbor.

It is a life-long discipline.

Discipline, as the author to the Hebrews reveals, signifies learning and knowledge.

Discipline involves education and training and instruction, but also correction and punishment.

The sacred author of Hebrews clearly indicates that maturing into a son or daughter of our Heavenly Father is not easy. It requires effort, struggle, even suffering.

The instruction comes from the stuff of our life, from living life itself. From the pains and joys of each day, we are taught by God how to mature into actually living like his children. From the classroom of life where we encounter the suffering and delights of each day, we are challenged to respond in being more generous and loving and merciful and kind, and so take on the values of the Beloved Son, Jesus.

God keeps teaching us and instructing us. The root meaning of the word “*discipline*” in the Letter to the Hebrews is the kind of training which comes from being instructed and trained. Sometimes that instruction is painful, because it demands that we change, that we die to an old way of thinking and living in order to begin a new life. Like a good teacher, our heavenly Father helps us learn by making us stretch beyond what we thought we were capable of, and he places before us the example of His Son.

One of the most demanding teachers I had in high school was my English Composition teacher, Mrs. Harris. Her class was hard—she expected a lot from us. But she prepared me for college and eventually for seminary by teaching me how to write, how to compose essays, reports, research papers, and stories.

I could not do so well with the many papers I had to write in my seminary studies if I had not been “*disciplined*” (instructed) by Mrs. Harris. I could not so readily write a daily Mass homily or Sunday homily or put together a talk if I had not gone through the “fire” of her classes on English Composition. I struggled initially with the idea of an “outline” for writing a paper, but Mrs. Harris’ insistence that we learn how to do “outlines” before even writing helps me to this day.

Now at the opposite end of the scale was my class on Oklahoma history, taught by one of the football coaches who expected nothing from us. We had fun in his class playing “paper football” games but I learned hardly anything about the history of our State, which I regret today.

The Master Teacher, the One who is Truth itself, the beloved Son of God, instructs us every day through His Spirit. To be his disciple literally means to sit at his feet and learn from him, Notice how close that word “*disciple*” is to the word, “*discipline*.”

I am still learning, and I have so much more to learn.
I am still striving to enter through the narrow gate.

The Gospel is the handbook, the guidebook, shedding light on who we are called to be. In fact, the “*narrow gate*” is the Gospel—with its call to faith, to generosity, to forgiveness, and to justice, especially for the poor.

It is not enough to eat and drink with him at this table.
It is not enough to simply listen to His teaching in this place.
We are invited to assume his values, to be like him, to look like him,
to invite Him into our lives so that our lives might be changed.

Christian faith is not a matter of going with the flow, of simply pursuing what makes us feel good, of engaging in a comforting spiritual hobby. Our relationship with Christ Jesus is to be rooted in the innermost parts of our being. This relationship is meant to transform our lives and how we love.

Just as Jesus’ struggle and obedience made it possible for his 1st disciples to do the same, everyone who strives today to enter through the narrow gate makes it a little easier for another to follow.

Our faith and our struggle continue Christ’s work of salvation, of bringing all people from all races and places into the feast that is the Kingdom of God.

For the more we strive, the more we understand that salvation is accomplished in surrendering ourselves to the saving love of God,
a divine love which makes brothers and sisters of us all.

Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi