

## Twenty-first Sunday Ordinary Time

“Lord, will only a few people be saved?” (see Lk 13:22-30) This was actually a question that was popular in the time of Jesus. There were basically two sides to this debate. Many Jewish scholars in the time of Jesus thought that all Jews would be saved. After all, they were the chosen people, the ones out of all the world that God had called to be His own. The people on the other side of the debate thought that there would only be a remnant that would be saved. They would also refer to the Jewish Scriptures such as the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah as to evidence that God would save only a remnant of Israel. This might help to make sense of why someone would ask Jesus this question.

Jesus does not answer the person’s question directly. Although, it is easy to see by His response which side Jesus leans to. Rather than answer the question directly, Jesus gets to the bigger issue at stake. “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough.” There may be many people that are faithful to God and think that heaven is assured for them after this life is over; however, Jesus tells us in this Gospel reading that this might not be the case. “Whoa, wait a minute father, are you telling me that I might not automatically get into heaven?” Well yes, that is what Jesus is suggesting here. What do we have for evidence to show this?

Jesus continues with a parable. “After the master has arisen and locked the door.” “The master has arisen” can easily refer to the Resurrection of Jesus; “and locked the door” can easily refer to the end of time when the world will come to an end. Many will be outside, knock on the door and say, “Lord, open the door for us.” And the master will say, “I don’t know where you are from.” “Lord, we ate and drank in your company.” The master will say, “I don’t know where you are from. Depart from me you evildoers.” So, we do have something here to show us what Jesus means. They ate and drank in His company, but he still doesn’t know them. He calls them evildoers. It takes more than eating and drinking in the Lord’s company to get into heaven. It also takes a change of heart and doing good deeds. They ate and drank in Jesus’ presence, but they continued to be attracted by the world and enjoying its sinful pleasures without repentance. There was no change of heart. Being in the presence of Jesus did not make a difference in their lives. And because of this, Jesus did not recognize the new creation that they were meant to be because of His grace.

An analogy might be helpful: When someone is hired by a company for a certain position, the company has certain requirements that the employee is expected to meet. The same thing is expected of people that join the military. Imagine if someone was hired by a company and then proceeded to do everything **but** what the company hired them to do. How long would it be until the employee was fired, especially if he or she didn’t change their ways? There are certain expectations that an employer has, and they have a right to have an employee meet those expectations. If those expectations aren’t met, then there will be consequences.

Just the same, God has certain expectations for people before they will be allowed to enter into heaven. After all, it’s God’s kingdom, not ours. We are adopted as God’s children in baptism. God pours forth His grace upon us in abundance in the sacrament. Once we are given this gift of new life in God and our sins forgiven we are expected to grow in His grace. God does not want this gift to be wasted. He does not want the gifts that He has given us to go into hibernation for the rest of our lives. God also doesn’t want us to use those gifts for sinful things either. God expects us to use those gifts to help build up His Kingdom here on earth, to produce good fruit, and do works of charity helping to relieve the suffering of others.

This should produce a feeling of uneasiness amongst us as Christians. We have eaten and drank in the Lord’s presence and heard His teachings. When we come to Mass we hear God’s word. The Scriptures are broken open for us in the homily. We believe that Jesus Himself is teaching us through the words of the preacher. Then we move to the table of the Lord. We share in the Eucharist. We eat His Body and drink His

**Blood. Then Jesus waits.** What is Jesus waiting for? Jesus is waiting to see if His word and His Body and Blood makes a difference in our lives. Do we follow His teachings? Receiving His Eucharist, do we give up our sinful habits and strive to become holier people? Are we helping to build up God's Kingdom here on earth through our words and actions? If all that I do is receive the Eucharist and then once I leave the church after Mass nothing changes in my life, then I might be one of those people that Jesus does not recognize when I come to the gate of heaven. If I leave the church after Mass and rarely think of God, I rarely pray, I continue on with a sinful way of life, then I shouldn't be surprised if one day Jesus tells me, "I don't know who you are?" And many of us will say, "But Lord, I came to Mass every weekend and received the Eucharist. I heard your word and suffered through some really boring homilies." And Jesus might say, "Sorry, that's not enough suffering. I don't know who you are. Depart from Me."

Jesus expects to make a difference in our lives. He wants all of us to become saints. He wants to present each one of us before His heavenly Father and show off the beautiful creation that we have become because we allowed His grace to transform us into God's very likeness. Jesus told His disciples to strive to enter in through the narrow gate. Striving means that effort is required. In this case, serious effort is required. Take the time to pray, pray for others especially those that are difficult to pray for, do acts of charity, make a positive difference in the world. May people see Christ when they see us. And if we strive our best to do all of these things, may we hear Jesus say one day, "I know who you are. Come, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."