

21st Sunday in Ordinary time C/2007

At the heart of every Christian, there is a silent, but a burning question: Who will be saved? Will only those be saved who practice faithfully their faith, and the zealous Christians, or will all be saved, even those who are not assiduous in their devotions? Today's readings try to answer these questions by showing us the true reality of God's kingdom and the conditions set before us in order to enter it.

In the first reading, God declares that he is open to all the people of all nations and languages and he will gather all before him to see his glory. He will gather them from all over the world to Jerusalem, and his fame and glory will be proclaimed to distant coastlands and among the nations. As Israel did, the foreign nations will bring offering and sacrifice to the house of the Lord. God will even choose his priests among them for the glory of his name.

The point of this prophecy of Isaiah is that God rejects any kind of clannishness that limits the salvation only to some people. He removes any barrier that divides peoples and claims all as his own and fit for his salvation. This universal perspective of salvation is the main concern of Jesus. As stated in today's Gospel, people will come from the east and west and from the north and the south to recline at God's table in his kingdom.

The universal perspective of salvation means that God is open to everybody; he is not exclusive; his kingdom is open to anyone who wants to enter it. However, the fact that God's kingdom is inclusive does not mean that the entry is automatic. That is why Jesus warns us against the temptation of laziness and naivety of thinking that once we believe, our goal is achieved. For him, anyone who is longing for his kingdom should strive to enter through the narrow gate. He has to remain vigilant, because the last can be first, and the first can be last. After all, the entry into God's kingdom is the result and the reward of struggle.

In other words, the entry in God's kingdom is open to anyone, but some efforts are required in order to cross its threshold. In the same way, God's love is always inclusive, but its fulfillment is demanding. God wants us to be saved, but he cannot save us without our collaboration. That is so true that, if those who already believe in God do not live according to his commands, they run the risk of finding themselves one day outside and rejected.

That is the sense of the parable of today. To put it in other words, we can say that the reality of the kingdom demands a permanent conversion of heart so that we are able to live, and conform ourselves to God's will. We have to continually reform our lives through the hearing of the word of the Lord, and by putting it into practice.

This time in which we live today is the appropriate time to do all that. Your "today" is really important because it prepares your "tomorrow"; your present life in the Lord is really important, because it builds up your future life with the Lord. If we miss the opportunity today, it will be a time where any possibility of turning back will be impossible. At that time, Christ will lock the door, because everything and every game will be over; history, itself, would have achieved its course.

The intention of Jesus in telling us this parable is indeed to invite us to take seriously the present situation of our life, and to act by making it an opportunity of improving our relationship with the Lord. Like those who came late, and to whom the master of the house said, he did not know them, so will there be no excuse for us at the end of time.

As some would easily think, this declaration of Jesus is not designed to push us to live in fear of the future judgment. On the contrary, it is destined to bring us to make wise and profitable choices for our eternal life. God loves us so much that what he wants is only that we react favorably and responsibly to his love. He does not deny our freedom or withdraw it from us, but rather he respects it.

There is no salvation for those who are not open to it and do not work for it. That is the reason why Jesus did not answer the question presented to him, as to whether only a few people will be saved;; he left the question open. That silence reminds us that the most important is not to know the number of those who enter into kingdom, but that of who can be indeed among these people. The simple test would be: How do you act on a daily basis in order to enter God's kingdom? It belongs to each one of us to give a personal answer to that question.

In the search to answer this question, we have to take advantage of all the circumstances and events happening in our life in order to come close to God – even if some of them might be unfortunate. This statement helps us understand what is at stake in the second reading.

In fact, this text does not say that God is determined to punish us as though that gladdens him; on the contrary, what it does is just to give us a key to interpretation so that we may look at the misfortunes happening in our lives in a more positive way. In other words, the text invites us to look at trials of life as something destined to give us discipline. The comparison it uses is in fact aimed at that purpose. Like a good father who always disciplines his beloved child in order to make him better, God sometimes uses the painful circumstances that occur to us to help us improve, to urge us to become better and to break from our sinful situation. It would not be a mark of love to let a son do whatever he likes and have nothing but an easy way. Doing so would give the impression that the father considers his son as no better than an illegitimate child to whom he feels no love or responsibility. Perhaps it is better to endure trials now than to be punished later!

Let us pray that the Lord helps us take advantage of the circumstances of our life to come close to the Lord. Let us work with eagerness for our salvation while we still have time in this world. May God bless each one of you to persevere in the Lord in spite of difficult circumstances crossing our life! May God bless you all!



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Isaiah 66, 18-21; Hebrews 12, 5-7. 11-13; Luke 13, 22-30