

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2010

It happens sometimes that we ask questions like the following: Is the kingdom of heaven exclusive or inclusive? Will everybody be saved or only a few people? Is salvation reserved only to those who believe in God or is the contrary also possible? The readings of this Sunday try to answer these questions by showing us the true reality of God's kingdom and the conditions required in order to enter it.

The first reading describes the promise God made to Isaiah to gather all the nations of the earth before him. God promises that all the peoples will come and see his glory. Consequently, all the distant coastlands will proclaim his glory among the nations. As Israel did, they will bring offering and sacrifice to the house of the Lord in Jerusalem and God will choose priests among them for the glory of his name.

What is behind this prophecy is the idea that God is not only a God of Israel, but of all the nations of earth. If that is the case, all the peoples are his children and deserve his salvation. This inclusive dimension and universal perspective of salvation will be emphasized more and more by Jesus in his teaching. For Jesus, people will come from the East and the West and from the North and South to recline at the table of God in his Kingdom. As true as that is, however, salvation is not automatic; it is something for which we have to be found trustworthy of it by our way of living and working for it. All that explains the importance of the parable Jesus gives us in today's Gospel.

First of all, Jesus warns us against the presumption of thinking that once we believe in God or are baptized, everything is done. On the contrary, he invites us to realize that in order to inherit God's kingdom, we have to strive to enter through the narrow gate. The narrow gate symbolizes the renunciation of sins and the permanent conversion of heart without which we cannot please God. That is why Jesus insists that we remain vigilant, lest we become the last after having been the first to receive faith.

All that infers that the entry into God's kingdom is the result of struggle. Of course, God's kingdom is open to everybody, but some efforts are required in order to cross its threshold. Of course, God wants us to be saved, but he cannot save us if we don't cooperate. Without living according to God's commands, we run the risk of finding ourselves one day outside and rejected. That time would be a big surprise.

Therefore, this time of ours is a time we have to do something for our salvation. What we do today for our salvation is important, because it allows us to prepare ourselves for the life after this one. In our journey, there will be a time where any possibility of turning back will be impossible. We have to take advantage of the present time as God's grace for conversion and reconciliation with God and with our brothers and sisters. We have to remember that there will be a time where the door will be locked as everything will be over and history itself will achieve its course.

The point of the parable, indeed, consists in the invitation Jesus addresses us to take seriously the present situation of our life as an opportunity of conversion. 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.

By giving such a parable, is Jesus pushing us to live in fear of the future judgment? Not at all. On the contrary, he warns us about the importance of making wise and profitable choices for our eternal life. In other words, God loves us so much that he wants us to react favorably and responsibly to his love. He does not deny our freedom or withdraw it from us, but rather he respects it.

If that is the case, it means that in order to have salvation, we have to 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 God's kingdom, but that of doing everything in our abilities in order to be saved.

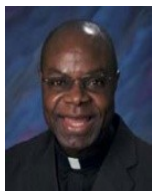
For that reason, we have to take advantage of any circumstance of life and make it an opportunity for our salvation. Here, everything counts, including the sad and unfortunate events that cross our lives. This statement helps us understand what is at stake in the second reading.

This text, in fact, does not mean that God is determined to punish us as though that gladdens him. What it does, on the contrary, is 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 gospel invites us to look at trials of life as a way of educating us. The comparison it uses, in fact, aims at that purpose. Like a good father who always disciplines his beloved child in order to make him or her better, God sometimes uses the painful circumstances that occur to us in order to help us improve and break from sins.

As a father or a mother who loves his or her child cannot let him or her do whatever he or she wants without being corrected, so does God act with us. He educates us through the painful happenings and hardships of life. In that perspective, if we accept well our sufferings, they may open our eyes to the real values of life and lead us to repentance. I wonder if it would not be better to endure trials now than to be punished later!

Let us pray then that the Lord may help us take advantage of the circumstances of our life to come close to him. Let us work 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 your life! May God bless you all!



Homily Date: August 22, 2010
© 2010 – Fr Felicien I. Mbala, PhD, STD
Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20100822homily.pdf

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