

Twenty-First Sunday in Ord. Time C/2013

The readings of this Sunday talk about salvation. They show that God's salvation is open to all the people of the earth. However, the fact that salvation is given to everybody does not mean it is automatic. We need to freely consent to its requirement and live by God's standards in order to deserve it.

The first reading describes in strong words, God's intention to gather all the nations of the earth to him. People from distant lands will come to Jerusalem and see God's glory. They will bring with them all the children of Israel scattered among the nations. As Israel did, those people will bring offerings and sacrifices to the house of the Lord in Jerusalem and God will choose among them priests for the glory of his name.

What is behind this text is first of all the idea that the whole world belongs to God. Because of that, God knows the works and the thoughts of people and nations wherever they are in the world. Another idea is the truth that if the whole world belongs to him, God is not a God of Israel alone, but of all the people of the earth. For that reason, all the people have the duty to honor him and to offer him their praise.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus warns us about the danger of losing our salvation. First of all, the Gospel starts with the question asked of Jesus over the number of those who will be saved, whether they will be only few or all the people?

Without directly answering the question, Jesus invites his interlocutor to strive to enter through the narrow gate, because many will attempt, but will not succeed. Then, Jesus gave a parable by saying that after the master of the house will have locked the door, people will be standing outside begging to enter, but he will not let them in because he does not know them.

In spite of their allegations that they ate and drank with him; despite their declaration that the master taught in their streets, the latter will reject them not only because he does not know them, but also because he considers them as evildoers.

Consequently, there will be wailing and grinding of teeth when people will see Abraham and the prophets in the kingdom, while they will be cast out. The Gospel finishes with Jesus' warning, namely that people will come from all over the cardinal points of the earth to feast in the kingdom of God, making the last first and the first last.

What do we learn from these readings? The point I want to bring to your attention today is the danger of human presumption about eternal salvation.

In fact, as we heard in the first reading as well as in the Gospel, salvation is given to all the people of the earth without any distinction of race, language, color of the skin or nation. There is no exception, because all are God's creatures and all are God's children. In that perspective, God is open to everybody of those who seek him. He does not exclude anybody, because he is not exclusive. Should anyone long to enter his kingdom, he will let him do it.

However, though salvation is inclusive and universal, it is not automatic. We have to be found worthy of it. We have to force ourselves to enter it by our way of life that reflects

God's manner of life. We cannot live a disordered life and hope that we will enter the kingdom of heaven.

That is why Jesus insists that we enter through the narrow gate, which is a symbol of effort, sacrifice, and renunciation of sins and conversion of heart. In that sense, we have to remain faithful to Jesus, lest we become the last after having been the first to receive faith. We have to understand that God wants to save us, but he cannot save us without our cooperation.

To cooperate means to live by his commandments and to renounce sins. If we do not do that, we will be one day surprised for having been left outside the hall of God's banquet. I believe that this is the reason why the presumption of thinking that, because we have been baptized and believe in God, everything is done, is dangerous. I also believe that this is the reason why Jesus did not answer the question of whether only a few people will be saved.

By remaining silent, Jesus leaves that question open. But, at the same, that silence reminds us that the most important is not to know the number of people who will enter God's kingdom, but that of doing everything in our abilities in order to be saved.

Let us draw some consequences from this vision. First, there is the importance of the present time. The British say, "Time is money". Let us say for us that time is an important factor in the making of our salvation. The time we have today is the moment that God gives us to work for our salvation.

What we do today for our salvation is important, because it prepares our future with God. It means also that time will come where any possibility of starting again or of having a second chance will be over. We have to take advantage of the present time as God's grace for our conversion and return to God. We have to remember that there will be a time where the door will be locked and everything will be over, including our own history.

Second, there is the opportunity of the moment. Experience has taught us that life is made up of opportunities. Opportunities come and go. However, the opportunity we lose today, we are not sure that we can have it again tomorrow. If we cannot make up our mind while this opportunity is still there, who knows what will happen to us tomorrow.

Let us pray, then, that the Lord may help us take advantage of the circumstances of our life and change for the best for our eternal salvation. May he give us the grace of conversion of heart so that we 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 our life! May God bless you all!

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



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