

21ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

By Al Mansfield

Isaiah 66:18-21

Psalm 117

Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13

Luke 13:22-30

MANY OR FEW

Salvation is offered to everyone. But how many will, in fact, be saved? That question has been asked for over 2000 years and is still being asked today. Although salvation is freely offered to all, it would not seem, to external appearances at least, that very many take advantage of the offer. Our readings today discuss this crucial topic.

ISAIAH

Today's first reading is from the last chapter of Isaiah. It depicts all nations coming together to worship the Lord in Jerusalem. Salvation is universal in the sense that all are invited. This does not necessarily mean, of course, that everyone will accept the invitation or fulfill the conditions for salvation.

The Responsorial, Psalm 117, stresses that the message of salvation is to go out to the whole world: "Go out to all the world and tell the Good News."

GOSPEL

Today's gospel account takes place while Jesus is making his journey toward Jerusalem, and to the destiny that awaits him there. The question is asked of him, "Lord, will only a few people be saved?" Jesus' answer is straightforward: "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough."

As mentioned, this question has been asked for two millennia: "Will many be saved?" A friend, Ralph Martin, wrote his doctoral dissertation in theology on this topic. He makes a persuasive case that some theologians seem to have been misled on this point and make it sound like everyone - or almost everyone - will be saved (despite what the Scriptures indicate).

The gospel reading today, for example, states that many "will attempt to enter, but will not be strong enough," clearly indicating that they will not, in fact, be able to enter. The master will answer those knocking on the door, "I do not know where you are from." He will cast them out, saying to them, "Depart from me, you evildoers."

The bottom line is, "some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last."

HEBREWS

Our second reading is all about discipline. Just as a loving and responsible father disciplines his children, so does the Lord discipline us, his children. We should not be discouraged at this but rejoice that the Lord is treating us as his sons. "For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?"

We are exhorted to accept the Lord's discipline maturely and realize that it is meant to make us holy. We need faith and courage to act like mature sons.

HIGH STAKES

The first reading indicates that the call to salvation and holiness is universal. The second reading teaches us that we must endure God's discipline if we are really his children. Our gospel tells us to "Strive to enter through the narrow gate..." The stakes are high.

Salvation is offered in the Person of Jesus Christ, but the right choices must be made. In this "testing ground" that is our life on this earth, we pray for the grace to choose wisely, that is, in accord with God's will and plan - to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior and to live according to his word.

The stakes are high indeed - in fact, they could not be any higher!