

Homily For the 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year C

St Peter's Sunday 8:00, 9:30, 11:30, 5:00 Masses - August 21, 2022

Isaiah 66: 18-21 "I am coming to gather all nations and tongues, and they shall come and see my glory."

Psalms 117:1-2 "Praise the Lord, all you nations. Extol him all you peoples."

Hebrews 12:5-7,11-13 "The Lord disciplines the one whom he loves, and chastises all whom he accepts."

Luke 13:22-30 "You will be thrown out and people will come from east and west to eat in the kingdom."

The Narrow Door

Introduction

It is always great on a Sunday to take a pause from the busy things we do the rest of the week. That's why it says God rested on the 7th day. It wasn't because he was tired. It was so we would stop for a whole day and just thank him and be happy. The 7th day is meant to make us think a little about heaven, starting with the chance to honour and worship God who gave us this life and calls us on to eternal life in heaven. We have this life, but he wants to give us so much more in heaven.

If I asked everyone here whether they want to go to heaven, there would probably be a decent show of hands. If I went out to the streets where there are people and asked the same question, the answer would probably not be that enthusiastic. What I think is that people today think heaven will be boring. That could not be further from the truth. Try imagining the most happy or the most peaceful moment of your life. Heaven is like that all the time. Except there is no time. There is only peace and happiness. Today there are so many things to amuse us that we might have a hard time thinking that heaven could be better than video games and Netflix and reality TV and chocolate and ice cream and pizza. But it is. Way better.

Luke

Jesus talked about heaven a lot. If you really want to be a follower of Jesus, you have to listen to him talk about heaven. As Jesus was walking along, someone on

the street asked him about this exactly that. Listen to how that question is worded: Lord, will only a few be saved? I'm asking for a friend. To be saved means to go to heaven. It's the same question. It sounds like the questioner is understanding Jesus to say that there won't be as many there as people think. What? How can that be? People who won't be going to heaven? Impossible. God would never close the door to anyone would he? Well, except maybe serial killers, and I'm not a serial killer so I should be ok.

But Jesus says it is a narrow gate or door that leads to heaven and eternal life, and lots of people miss it. He says that many will try to enter but won't be strong enough. The narrow gate is like the eye of the needle too small for the camel to pass through. It's not easy. The gate is wide enough for a person, any person. But, it's not wide enough for us to carry our possessions, our social status, our arrogance. None of that will fit. If we insist on trying to take our earthly pleasures with us, we won't get through.

Jesus' answer is personal. YOU must keep on striving. It is a lifelong effort like that of an athlete who must keep up the effort to win the prize. Then Jesus tells a parable about people being refused. They say, hey, we ate with you? Remember that. We listened to podcasts about you. Jesus is not just talking about those in Capernaum and Magdala. He is talking about everyone who just wants a nice Jesus who doesn't ask much of us except don't be a serial killer.

He will say he doesn't know us because we didn't strive and to accept discipline. He will say he doesn't know us because we did not share our lives with him. We did not seek out a friendship, a relationship with him. You can't be a passive member of Christ. You have to strive. It's hard work, but not the hard work of earning a spot in heaven. It's the hard work of remaining faithful to the gift of salvation we receive from the Lord. You have to let go of your attachments. It won't be like the airport security person who says, you can't bring that bottle of water through. It will be more like on the plane when your bag won't fit in the bin. If it doesn't fit you can't take it. Our worldly attachments are like that. Jesus doesn't have to say stop, you can't come in. He doesn't have to. We just won't be able to get through the narrow door.

The people defended themselves: Hey, we hung out with you. I do not know you is a reflection of a fact with that person who has not sought a relationship with Jesus but has stood back at a distance from him and not entered through the door which is him.

Jesus is always ready for relationship with us. Relationship means knowing and being known, loved and challenged to become the person he created us to be. Our heavenly father loves us and desires that his children live with him forever.

This should lead us to prayer and repentance. Prayer is like talking to a friend, sharing our thoughts and challenges. Give time to prayer and you will enter the narrow gate of relationship with God. Take your ordinary life and place it before God as an offering. Fix your attention on him. You will be changed from the inside out and be able to respond to him. This is the narrow gate.

The Second Vatican Council clearly affirmed, God wills the salvation of all peoples. All are invited to share in the heavenly banquet. But, from what Jesus says, many of us are going to say, that's just too hard and I'm really fine the way I am.

Our responsibility is to obey Jesus, which is to put into practice everything he taught us. First, know what he teaches and second, obey him. There is absolutely nothing on earth that is worth giving up salvation.

There are going to be times when we miss the mark. That's what sin is. This is when Jesus disciplines us. It is training to become more and more like him. We can only do this if we spend time with him.

There are four things that the New Testament says are necessary for salvation. In John 3:16 Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born again of water and spirit. That's baptism. In John 6, Jesus tells crowds that they must eat his flesh. That's the Eucharist. St. Paul tells the Romans: "If you profess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart the God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. That's faith. But in Matthew and everywhere else in the Gospels, there is the fourth requirement. You have to do the father's will. None of these four say, well just be a sort of good person and not a serial killer.

Heaven is not a prize for participation. It is a reorientation of my life to God. There is no one for whom Christ did not suffer and die. But we have to respond and cooperate with what he did. If not, he will not know us.

Look at the people who followed Jesus in his time. They were attracted to his message of love. He healed people and promised a better world. Who wouldn't want to be a part of that? But then he started talking about taking up a cross. When he indicated that discipleship was also going to be hard, then some people turned away. Only those who really knew and loved him stayed around.

I think about the mother of the thief on the cross who asked for forgiveness. That mother can hope her son will go to heaven because he turned his heart over to the crucified Jesus.

Isaiah

The book of the prophet Isaiah ends with vision that all nations will come and worship the God of Israel, a ridiculous prophecy at the time and yet it came true. The Lord will gather distant peoples who have never heard of God's glory. The gathering of everyone together is for worship. As always, worship is not for God's benefit but for ours. We need that every seven days.

The reason for gathering the peoples is so that all may see God's glory. Nations named in the reading were located in southern Spain, Africa, near the Black Sea, and Greece. New followers come to the Lord in diverse ways i.e. the different animals. Where are the dynamic growth areas for the Catholic faith. We have always had Latin America, the Philippines, parts of Asia. The most dynamic area of growth of the faith is in Africa. It's also the place where tremendous persecution of Christians is taking place.

Be Saved

Today let us strive to be with Jesus while we have time. For those of us that have not yet crossed the threshold of death, salvation is still only a possibility. Will you be saved or will you be condemned? That is, will you accept or will you reject

God's everlasting offer of love? Will you fit through the narrow door, or will you have too many things that keep you attached to this world?

We have only two possibilities in our life: either God or nothing, for without God nothing has any meaning. God is constantly looking at the sinner with love, and in order not to force his freedom. We are free to turn our soul towards the Savior, and we are also free to be obstinate in our refusal to do so.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *Turn your ear, O Lord, and answer me. Save the servant who trusts in you. Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I cry to you.*

Collect: *O God, grant your people to love what you command and to desire what you promise, that our hearts may be fixed on true gladness.*

Isaiah: *Thus says the Lord: "I am coming to gather all nations and tongues, and they shall come and see my glory, and I will set a sign among them. From them I will send survivors to the nations ... that have not heard of my fame. They shall declare my glory among the nations. They shall bring all your kindred from all the nations, just as the children of Israel bring a grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the Lord. And I will also take some of them as priests and as Levites, says the Lord."*

Psalm: *Go into all the world and proclaim the good news. Praise the Lord, all you nations. Extol him, all you peoples. For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.*

Hebrews: *Brothers and sisters: "You have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children - My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him. For the Lord disciplines the one whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he accepts. Now discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may be healed."*

Luke: *Jesus went through towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, "Lord, will only a few be saved?" Jesus said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able. When you stand outside and knock at the door saying 'Lord, open to us.' Then in reply he will say to you, 'I do not know where you come from.' Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you and you taught in our streets.' But the Lord will say, 'I do not know where you come from. Go away from me, all you evildoers!' There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out. Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God. Indeed, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last."*