

Sunday, August 25, 2019

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Isaiah 66:18-21

Responsorial: Psalm 117:1-2

2nd Reading: Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13

Gospel: Luke 13:22-30

The Vastness of God's Call in Drawing People to Himself and His Kingdom

People will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south. (Luke 13:29)

Going to a Catholic church in another country can be a real eye-opener. The language or accent might be different. The liturgy might have a different flair. And the people in the pews might not look like your fellow parishioners. That's part of the beauty of the Church!

In today's Gospel, when someone asks Jesus whether only a few will be saved, Jesus is quick to broaden his perspective. The heavenly banquet table is very large, he says! Yes, the gate is narrow, and it takes effort to enter. But that doesn't mean heaven will be empty. History tells us that many, many people have been more than willing to enter through that narrow gate. The result? All the great saints and heroes of the faith will be reclining at table with a multitude of people: men, women, and children from every race and nation, from every cultural and economic background. The Lord is not stingy when it comes to drawing people to himself. In fact, the more the merrier!

The key is entry through the narrow gate. That's the action of faith that unites us. Whether you're from the north, south, east, or west, a prince or a peasant, it doesn't matter. If you've entered through that narrow door—if you've turned to the Lord in faith and Baptism—you belong in God's kingdom. You have a place reserved for you at the banquet table of the Lord.

Now, just as you are a part of the people of God, so are the people in your community, everyone who serves side-by-side with you at your parish. But so are people who speak a different language or whose culture or economic status is very unlike your own. So are people in prison cells and in homeless shelters. So is the annoying neighbor down the street whose faith is known to God alone. In God's eyes, everyone is equally deserving of his love. Because God wants everyone in his kingdom. So let's make space next to ourselves at the Lord's banquet table.

"Lord, help me to welcome anyone who comes to you in faith."

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

Sunday, August 25, 2019

Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion:

1. The first reading begins with these words spoken by the Lord: *I know their works and their thoughts, and I come to gather nations of every language; they shall come and see my glory. I will set a sign among them; from them I will send fugitives to the nations: to Tarshish, Put and Lud, Mosoch, Tubal and Javan, to the distant coastlands that have never heard of my fame, or seen my glory; and they shall proclaim my glory among the nations.*
 - What do these words mean to you? *I come to gather nations of every language; they shall come and see my glory.*
 - The reading also speaks of sending out men and women to the *distant coastlands that have never heard of my fame, or seen my glory.* In what ways do these words apply to you and your call to share the Gospel message with others?
 - Even if you are not able to be a missionary, what are some countries that need to hear the Gospel preached and see the glory of the Lord? Are you willing to spend time on a regular basis praying for them? If not, why what?
2. The Responsorial Psalm contains these words: *Praise the LORD all you nations; glorify him, all you peoples! For steadfast is his kindness toward us, and the fidelity of the LORD endures forever.* The response is *Go out to all the world and tell the Good News.*
 - How does the response in the Responsorial Psalm apply to you?
 - In what way is *all the world* for most of us primarily our family, coworkers, neighbors, and friends?
 - What are some new steps you can take to tell the good news of Jesus Christ to those who need to hear it?
3. The second reading opens with these words: *Brothers and sisters, You have forgotten the exhortation addressed to you as children: "My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when reproved by him; for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines; he scourges every son he acknowledges." Endure your trials as "discipline"; God treats you as sons. For what "son" is there whom his father does not discipline?* It continues with these words: *At the time, all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain, yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it.*
 - What do the opening words of the reading mean regarding *not to disdain the discipline of the Lord or lose heart*?
 - How would you describe the ways the Lord uses to discipline you?
 - How would you describe the *fruit of righteousness* of the Lord's purifying discipline in your life?
4. In the Gospel reading, Jesus was asked the following question: *"Lord, will only a few people be saved?"* He responds to this question with these words: *"Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough."* He then tells the parable about a *"master of the house"* who *"has arisen and locked the door."* It ends with these words of Jesus: *"And there will be wailing and grinding of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves cast out. And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God. For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."*
 - What message do you think the Lord was trying to convey by his response to the question he was asked?
 - In the parable, what do you think the master of the house meant when he says, *"I do not know where you are from"?*
 - What do the ending words of the reading mean to you? Are they a source of hope or concern for you?
 - What are some additional steps you can take that will help you to be a good and faithful servant?
5. The meditation is a reflection on the Gospel reading and this verse: *People will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south* (Luke 13:29). It includes these words: *"In today's Gospel, when someone asks Jesus whether only a few will be saved, Jesus is quick to broaden his perspective. The heavenly banquet table is very large, he says! Yes, the gate is narrow, and it takes effort to enter. But that doesn't mean heaven will be empty. History tells us that many, many people have been more than willing to enter through that narrow gate."* It goes on to include these words: *"If you've entered through that narrow door—if you've turned to the Lord in faith and Baptism—you belong in God's kingdom. You have a place reserved for you at the banquet table of the Lord."*
 - What do you think is meant by these words from the meditation? *The heavenly banquet table is very large, he says! Yes, the gate is narrow, and it takes effort to enter. But that doesn't mean heaven will be empty. History tells us that many, many people have been more than willing to enter through that narrow gate.*
 - How do these words from the meditation apply to you? *Whether you're from the north, south, east, or west, a prince or a peasant, it doesn't matter. If you've entered through that narrow door—if you've turned to the Lord in faith and Baptism—you belong in God's kingdom. You have a place reserved for you at the banquet table of the Lord.*

Take some time now to pray and ask for the grace to welcome and receive other faith-filled Christians, especially those who are quite different than you. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as a starting point.

"Lord, help me to welcome anyone who comes to you in faith."

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is currently a member of the board of directors of the ChristLife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization (www.christlife.org), a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (www.nsc-chariscenter.org), and a board member of The Love of Christ Foundation. Prior to this, Maurice was the founding executive director of the National Fellowship of Catholic Men, a chairman of the board of The Word Among Us (www.wau.org), and a director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry]