

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle C

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Isaiah 66:18-21

Last week our Old Testament reading was from the Book of Jeremiah. This week we back up some 90 years in history to the year 694 B.C. and hear from the greatest of the prophets, Isaiah. Little is known about Isaiah as all our information comes from his discourses. According to Jewish tradition, he was of royal stock and it is certain that he belonged to the tribe of Judah and lived in Jerusalem. He was married and had two sons. He did not claim to be a prophet in the current sense of the word, but, like many other prophets, he gathered around him a circle of friends and disciples who shared his views and were initiated into his plans. Today we hear from the last chapter of the Book of Isaiah as he tells of a time when foreigners will be at home in God's house.

18 I come to gather nations of every language; they shall come and see my glory.

This phrase is reminiscent of Isaiah 40:5. It could also refer to an object of pilgrimage in the temple.

19 I will set a sign among them;

The sign centers on the survival of Jerusalem, to become the object of the new exodus for the Jews of the dispersion and even for Gentiles.

from them I will send fugitives to the nations: to Tarshish,

In southern Spain

Put and Lud,

In Africa

Mosoch,

Location unknown

Tubal

Near the Black Sea

and Javan,

Greek settlers in the Ionian Islands

to the distant coastlands that have never heard of my fame, or seen my glory; and they shall proclaim my glory among the nations. ²⁰ They shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as an offering to the LORD,

A sort of triumphal procession from all directions.

on horses and in chariots, in carts, upon mules and dromedaries, to Jerusalem, my holy mountain, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their offering to the house of the LORD in clean vessels. ²¹ Some of these I will take as priests and Levites, says the LORD.

It is not clear who the “some” are, but Gentiles are included in the previous verse. This is seen by many as a prophecy that someday the priesthood will not be solely Levitical but will also include Gentiles.

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

Having heard two weeks ago about the faith of Abraham, a faith of hope and trust – an example of the theological faith that we all should have, last week we began to hear how we are to live out that faith. Our second reading last week ended “In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood.” Today we continue this lesson.

⁵ You have [] forgotten the exhortation addressed to you as sons:

The quotation is quoted from Proverbs 3:11-12.

“My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord

Positive and negative reinforcement

or lose heart when reprovved by him; ⁶ for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines; he scourges

Whips

every son he acknowledges.” ⁷ Endure your trials as “discipline”; God treats you as sons. For what “son” is there whom his father does not discipline? ¹¹ 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. ¹² So strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees. ¹³ Make straight paths for your feet, that what is lame may not be dislocated but healed.

As you will recall, last week the imagery was that of a race, the imagery now changes from a race course to the familiar one of the road on which the people of God must journey.

Gospel - Luke 13:22-30

Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem and His passion. Along the way He taught with parables, performed miracles and preached repentance. This preaching and teaching, accompanied by miracles, caught the attention of those He came in contact with: the Pharisees became indignant because He healed people on the Sabbath, but others heard the clear message of repentance and wished to know that they must do to be saved.

²² He [Jesus] passed through towns and villages, teaching as he went and making his way to Jerusalem. ²³ Someone asked him, “Lord, will only a few people be saved?”

Being “saved” is not a Protestant idea; they took it from the Catholics. Being saved in Catholic theology is the end result – seeing God face-to-face in heaven. It begins with faith and is the result of how that faith is lived out. One cannot “earn” their way into heaven, that is the Pelagian heresy condemned by the Council of Carthage in A.D. 418, but one is required to allow God to work in their life and that work is reflected in their actions.

He answered them, ²⁴ “Strive to enter

This denotes strenuous exercise of muscle and power.

through the narrow gate,

The implied contrast is between large city gates through which throngs can pass at one time, and one where everything is in single file.

for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough.

Jesus is not declaring that many are doomed from the very start, despite their persistent effort to be saved (which would be predestination in the Presbyterian sense).

²⁵ After the master of the house has arisen and locked the door, then will you stand outside knocking and saying, ‘Lord, open the door for us.’ He will say to you in reply, ‘I do not know where you are from.’

Many will seek entry too late, after the Kingdom has come; each one can and must strive now. Jesus must first recognize and love, and thus impart justifying faith. (See [Isaiah 63:16](#);

Matthew 25:12).

26 And you will say, 'We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets.'

Casual eating and drinking with Jesus is not enough; one must share in his life, as symbolized by His table fellowship with the lowly. One cannot simply boast that they are acquainted with Him and His message.

27 Then he will say to you, 'I do not know where (you) are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!' 28 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. 29 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.

The Kingdom of God is now imaged by the eschatological banquet [the wedding feast of the Lamb (Revelation 21)]. Those who do not want to commit themselves to Jesus' way find themselves on the outside. In graciousness God opens the banquet to all peoples. These now form the reconstituted Israel in the New Jerusalem.

30 For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

Luke sounds his familiar theme of reversal – those who truly serve others by living out God's message and their faith, will be served at the heavenly banquet

Notice that our gospel reading for today does not assure salvation for all those who believe; and who receives it is not known until they appear at the door to the banquet. This is why, when asked "Have you been saved?" we can answer: *"I have been saved from the penalty of sin by Christ's death and resurrection. I am being saved from the power of sin by the indwelling Spirit. I have the hope that I shall one day be saved from the very presence of sin when I go to be with God."* It is through the grace of Christ that I am able to live out His life in me; a grace that is fortified every time I participate in the Eucharist.