

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN THE
CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 21, 2022**

SCRIPTURES:

Isaiah 66:18-21	God will gather his people at Jerusalem.
Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13	Trials are a discipline from the Lord.
Luke 13:22-30	Gentiles too will come into God's kingdom.

BIBLE BACKGROUND:

Luke:

Jesus and his disciples are still on their journey toward Jerusalem, toward their definitive encounter with God. The Church continues to receive *discipline*, a loving teaching, from the Lord Jesus. Those who had been chosen originally are not the only ones who will be admitted to the kingdom. Some may even be excluded for being *evildoers*. The original reference in Jesus' teaching obviously applies to the Jews, his contemporaries, and those who share this heritage. It is not enough to have *eaten and drunk* with him or to have heard his teachings. Faithfulness to the teachings emerges as a requirement.

The Church of Luke needed to be reassured that it, too, largely of Gentile origin, would be part of the universal kingdom. Coming from *east and west, north and south* clearly designated the Christians of Gentile lands. Those last to be called, again the Gentiles, will be *first* in God's kingdom. Whereas the Temple in Jerusalem was probably already destroyed and the People of Promise were being scattered to the four winds, these Gentile Christians are beginning to wonder, "Will the same happen to us?"

Scholars have found what they call an **A-B-B,'-A'** arrangement of events: **A**: Cure of the crippled woman (13:10-17); **B**: Small seed and yeast (13:18-21); **B'**: Narrow gate; narrow door (13:22-27); **A'**: Not a single *daughter of Abraham but all who want to come!* These devices of cultural rhetoric show how sophisticated the author had to be in order to arrange these materials in this way.

The manner in which Luke has woven this material, differently from Matthew, ends up giving a whole new message and parable. Jesus calls his disciples to personal responsibility and righteousness. The crowd would have expected a rabbi to talk about what will happen to others. Jesus asks them to pay attention rather to what will happen to them. He issues a call to repentance. They are the ones who need to repent, not some other unspecified group of people.

Jesus' immediate audience often claimed salvation for themselves because they were descendants of Abraham. The disciples of Jesus cannot boast that they were acquainted with him. That will not be enough. Unless they repent, they can have no claim on the kingdom of God.

Isaiah:

The Third Book of Isaiah (56-66) was probably written after the return from Exile in Babylon (539-333 BCE). A new consciousness of universal salvation has come into the minds of the people after the Exile. Gentiles, too, will be invited to the great feast of God's glory as symbolized by

Temple worship in Jerusalem. *Tarshish* was southern Spain for the ancients. Put and *Lud* refer to Africa. *Mosoch*, *Tubal*, and *Javan* were far to the east of Jerusalem. Even people from the coastlands, Gentiles also to be sure, will one day join the People of God in worship. Clean vessels indicate that even these Gentiles will not defile the worship of the one God. God divides the Lord's servants from the Lord's enemies. It is very significant that the servants are not just the people of Israel but those who tremble at God's word. Whereas, the *enemies* are not the Gentiles but those who have chosen their own way. God has a new standard by which to divide the people of the world.

Corinthians:

This section of the post-baptismal instruction we know as the Book of Hebrews takes a passage from Proverbs (3:11-12) [here in Hebrews, the quotation can be found at verses 5-6] and develops a homily on that text [here, verses 7, 10-13]. *Son* and *discipline* speak to us of the loving care that God exercises toward the chosen ones. Those who are *disciplined* have a better chance of becoming better *disciples*. The value of suffering in the lives of the disciples shines forth from this text. Jesus underwent suffering and emerged in glory. The assembly of the saints (the great cloud of witnesses) watches over us as we, too, run the race that contains suffering for us all. Our final glory comes from God as it came to Jesus after his Passion and death. For Israel, the *desert* turned out to be a place of healing. God will heal us in our desert experience.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How inclusive is your parish community? Are some of us still stuck in *our-kind-of-people-only* mentalities? The sin of racism still afflicts so many of us in most subtle ways. Has your parish changed demographically during the last 10 years? Have new people come to your church for worship? Do they feel comfortable among you?

2. What are the implications of this Gospel for those of us who eat and drink with the Lord and hear his teachings every Sunday at Eucharist? Will that do us any good if we do not repent profoundly? Have you ever found yourself assuming that if you go to church every Sunday you will have nothing to worry about?

3. How many times in your life have you been disciplined by the Lord? To what effect? Has it been good for you to have had to suffer? Did the Lord still love you through those trials? How is the Church being disciplined even now? Does Jesus love his Church when he allows it to be cleansed by trials and by pain? Give some examples from your own life.

PRAYER

PSALM 117 (Contemporary English Version)

**All you nations,
come praise the Lord!
Let everyone praise him.
His love for us is wonderful,
his faithfulness never ends.
Shout praises to the Lord!**

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE:

“UT UNUM SINT.” “That All May be One.” Pope Saint John Paul II issued an encyclical letter, a letter to all the churches, concerning Christian unity. The Holy Father yearned for a major breakthrough in the work of bringing all the Churches and ecclesial communities into a greater experience of unity for the Year 2000. “That All May Be One!” was the prayer of Jesus for his followers at the Last Supper. He prays for the unity of his disciples “...so that the world may know that you sent me, Father.” The deepest motive for our striving toward unity of the Church and of the Churches consists in giving witness to the truth that God has sent Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world. When non-believers look upon the divisions that still afflict the body of Christ, how can they want to be in the Church? To what purpose?

Pope Saint John Paul II reached out to all Christians: Protestants, Eastern Orthodox, ancient Oriental Churches. He called upon them and upon us to renew our efforts to find the way to unity, to remove some of the obstacles to that unity, to find a way to celebrate the same Lord, the same baptism, the same Eucharist, together.

Pope Saint John Paul II acknowledged that one of the major stumbling blocks for many other Christians happens to be the office and ministry of the pope himself. There are some Churches separated from us who could buy into almost everything except the primacy and the universal jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome. In other words, if the Catholic Church did not have a pope or if the pope exercised his ministry in a different manner, they might be more willing to consider a closer unity.

On this very issue, the pope invites Christians of other Churches to make suggestions as to how the papacy might become more acceptable to them. Is there some way in which the office and ministry of the Bishop of Rome might better serve to bring unity of faith and of community to all Christians? Without compromising the essentials of what we believe Christ wants from the leadership of the pope, can we make some changes that will allay the fears of the Orthodox, the Anglicans, the Lutherans, etc.?

The Churches all over the world will realize their fullest identity as “households of God in Jesus Christ,” when they enter and maintain full communion with the Church of Rome, according to the ancient teachings of St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Irenaeus, and St. Maximus the Confessor (*Catechism* #834). The pope holds his authority in the Church because he is the successor of Peter who was given the charge of “confirming the brethren” in faith and unity.

Catholic Catechism: #882, 937

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