

21st SUNDAY OF YEAR C August 25, 2019 (edited)

Given the increasing secularism, the ruthlessness, cruelty, fighting, and prevalent sinfulness of human beings, that is a good question, “Will only a few people be saved?” Jesus’ words in today’s gospel make one wonder. He said similar things at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew’s gospel. Jesus quotes the Golden Rule and then adds, **“Enter through the narrow gate. The gate that leads to damnation is wide, the road is clear, and many choose to travel it. But how narrow is the gate that leads to life, how rough the road, and how few there are who find it.”** (Mt 7: 14-15) When Jesus said, **“It is easier for a camel to pass through a needle’s eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God,”** that floored the apostles, who exclaim, **“Then who can be saved?”** (Mt. 19: 23-24)

We heard Isaiah prophesying about the future kingdom. **“I come to gather nations of every language; they shall come and see my glory. They shall bring all your brothers and sisters from all the nations as an offering to the Lord.”** Jesus’ description in the gospel we heard is similar, **“Many will come from the east and west, from north and south, to recline at the table in the kingdom of God.”**

Who will be included in that invitation to sit at the heavenly banquet? Christians only? Given inherited prejudices, that does not stop people from being saved. The church recognizes the possibility of an invincible ignorance that cannot be overcome by right reason and good example. Could that not mean some Buddhists, Muslims, Native Americans, Hindus, Confucians, and those in those ‘other flocks’ will be seated at the banquet table God has prepared for all those he has called?

At the Last Supper Jesus said these words over the chalice he passed around, **“This is the chalice of my blood, which will be poured out for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins.”** For a time after Vatican II the words in English were ‘poured out for you and for all’. Pope Benedict XVI instructed that it be changed to ‘for you and for many,’ reminding us there is such a place as hell and we must keep open the possibility that some may end up there.

What is going to help us to be among that few, or many, who will be saved? Well, listen to Jesus description of the final judgment: **‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. (Mt. 25:31 ff)**

They ask when they saw him hungry, thirsty, naked, a stranger, sick or in prison. Jesus told them **“As often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me.”** However there were those on the left who heard, **“You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”** **“Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.”**

Of course the corporal works of mercy are only part of the program. In the letter to the Hebrews we read, **“You must believe that God exists, and that he rewards those who seek him.”** Aside from the corporal and spiritual works of mercy there is that high bar Jesus raised, have you forgiven those who hurt you? Have you asked forgiveness from those you have hurt?

During his time on earth Jesus healed the sick and still heals the soul sickness of sinners by the power in the blood he shed. He drove out demons and he frees those deceived by Satan’s wiles and from the fear of death. He multiplied bread for the hungry. He continues to multiply the holy bread of the Eucharist. It is a pledge of eternal life for those who, in faith, receive it worthily. Rightly then having been given the gift of faith let us render honor, praise, thanksgiving, and humble obedience to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, now and forever. AMEN