

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

GOSPEL

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Through towns and villages Jesus went teaching, making his way to Jerusalem. Someone said to him, 'Sir, will there be only a few saved?' He said to them, 'Try your best to enter by the narrow door, because, I tell you, many will try to enter and will not succeed.

'Once the master of the house has got up and locked the door, you may find yourself knocking on the door, saying, "Lord, open to us" but he will answer, "I do not know where you come from." Then you will find yourself saying, "We once ate and drank in your company; you taught in our streets" but he will reply, "I do not know where you come from. Away from me, all you wicked men!"

'Then there will be weeping and grinding of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves turned outside. And men from east and west, from north and south, will come to take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.

'Yes, there are those now last who will be first, and those now first who will be last.'

(Luke 13:22-30)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The community for whom Luke wrote his Gospel was made up largely of Gentiles (non-Jews). They are the ones from the 'east and west, north and south' who have come to a place at the feast because they came to faith in the risen Christ.
- This is a text about the universality of God's love and the redemption God offers. It is not limited to a particular group or nationality. It is open to all who respond positively.
- Some Christian denominations have a very exclusive view of salvation and believe that only 'a few' will be saved. This is not the case with the Catholic Church, which sees the salvation offered by Christ as very inclusive—open to all who come to faith.
- In John's Gospel, Jesus refers to himself as the 'gate' through which people must come to be saved.

EXPLORING THE WORD

As the chosen people, the Jews believed they were in a privileged relationship with God. In this text, Jesus shatters some illusions. There is no privileged or exclusive entry to the kingdom of God by those who see themselves as 'religious insiders'. This is equally directed to the disciples. It is not enough that they have shared a meal with Jesus or have heard his word. They must respond to that word and act on it. They must enter by the narrow door, and this requires great effort, or else those who thought themselves 'inside' could find themselves 'outside', while others, 'the outsiders', will find their way ahead of them. This radical reversal of values and expectations would have shocked those who thought they were on the 'inside'.

- Getting through a narrow door is difficult, and we may feel tempted to go around instead. Is there a narrow door in your life that you must go through rather than go around?
- What does it mean that those who are first will later be last?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What does it mean to 'enter by the narrow door'?
- Do you make the most of the opportunities you have to be close to Jesus through prayer, service and living simply?
- Speak to each other of experiences you may have had of being an 'insider' or an 'outsider'.
- Who are the people in our society who are treated as 'outsiders'?
- Have you ever defended an 'outsider'? What was the result?
- Make choices for the 'narrow door' this week. Don't take the easy option, which requires so little of us. The more difficult option is often the one that brings greater reward. Go out of your way to be of service to others. Make extra time for prayer and reflection. Put yourself last and others first.
- This week's gospel acclamation from the Gospel of John makes a wonderful prayer:

I am the way, the truth and the life, says the Lord; no one comes to the Father, except through me.

SHARING THE TRADITION

A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God's word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ

Who will be saved? This is a difficult question. There is no doubt that God wants all people to be saved and that Jesus died to save all people.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, 'Believing in Jesus Christ and in the One who sent him for our salvation is necessary for that salvation' (§161). This quote should raise many questions and points of discussion. For example:

- What about people who have never heard of Jesus?
• What about babies who die before baptism?
• What does it mean to be 'saved'?
• What did humankind need saving from? What does humankind need saving from now?
• What happens to those who are not saved?
• How should we understand the concepts of heaven and hell?
• What role does human freedom play in this?
• What about good people of other religious traditions? Does this mean the Dalai Lama or Gandhi will not be 'saved'?

Some of the questions that may arise will not be easy, but the conversation is an important one!

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

One of the most common images of the kingdom of God is that of the feast or the banquet. A feast is not simply a meal; it is an abundant celebration of something wonderful, from which people draw nourishment, life and vitality. Such is the kingdom of God.

LIVING THE WORD

Practical ideas for group leaders to employ in connecting Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment

- Think about those around you, perhaps even in your family, who are the last to receive your attention, affection or support. Make them first this week.
• In what ways does your community seek to make the least the most important?
• Use the open Scriptures as a focus for prayer. Pray for those who are 'least'. Pray for all people of good will. Pray that all people will come to know the salvation offered through Christ. A suitable song could be 'The Summons' (GA 502). Conclude with the prayer of exorcism at RCIA §94E.

NOTES

Dotted lines for taking notes.