

21ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, C

SALVATION DEMANDS MORE THAN KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST

“‘Lord, open for us’ ... ‘I do not know where you come from’ ... ‘We once ate and drank in your company; and you taught in our streets’ ...I do not know where you come from. Away from me, all you wicked men.’” (Lk. 13: 25. 26-27)

Our Purpose in Life: On this Sunday, we focus our attention on the Kingdom of God and salvation. We were created in love by God to enjoy the beauty of His creation. He gave us authority over the earth. “Till the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1: 28), He commanded. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that the plan of God for each of us is to know Him, love Him, and serve Him in this life and hereafter possess life eternal (CCC. 1). This is the purpose of our lives. Christ has won salvation for us all. Heaven or God’s Kingdom is our homeland (Philippians 3:20). As St. Paul affirms this teaching in 2 Corinthians: “For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands” (2 Cor. 5:1). Because heaven is our goal, all our efforts on earth are geared towards the realisation of this purpose set for us by God, our Creator. This was the preoccupation of the person who asked Jesus the question in our Gospel today (Lk. 13: 22-30): “Sir, will there be only a few saved?” This question should be relevant for us today on a very personal note.

On the Question: If Jesus were to come to Church this morning, and you had the opportunity to ask Jesus just one question in 20 seconds, what would you ask? An anonymous bystander had that chance. And this is what he asked. Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem, a journey He began from Chapter 9: 51; on the way He has attracted a great crowd as He goes along. He uses this opportunity to teach them about many things; the people also exploit the privilege to ask questions on issues of concern. So today, the man in our story put this question concerning the number of those to be saved to Him. There was need to ask this question because there was already a controversy in the Mishnah (the teaching authority of the Rabbis on various aspects of the law, tradition, and religion) as to who and how many would be saved. Whereas some Rabbis had a universalistic explanation, that all Israelites and gentiles would be saved. The prophecies proclaimed this understanding loudly. For example, Isaiah in the First Reading (Isaiah 66: 18-21) says: “I am coming to gather the nations of every

language. They shall come to witness to My glory.” Others, no doubt, preferred the exclusivist position that only a few would be saved, excluding the generation of the flood, the sodomites, the generation of the dispersion, and those who committed grave sins. So here was yet another case of a genuine question in need of clarification from a respected authority.

Jesus’ Response: In answer, Jesus did not give a number or a percentage, instead He gives an instruction and a teaching: “Try your best to enter by the narrow door, because I tell you, many will try to enter and will not succeed.” This imagery of the narrow door is as sharp as the answer is surprising. The picture here is that of a crowd trying to enter a narrow door. Each person must struggle, perhaps fight, to squeeze through, no wonder He says, “Try your best to enter.” The idea of squeezing can be extended to the discipline, the self-denials and self-emptying sacrifices that are demanded in the process. It demands a lot of effort, struggles, exertion, and energy. This can be equally seen from the point of perseverance in the face of suffering as enunciated in the Second Reading (Hebrews 12: 5-7, 11- 13). The first message here, therefore, is that salvation is not easy; it is not gotten on a platter – one must take it by storm (Matthew 11: 12). We must make conscious, committed, and consistent efforts to be saved. Salvation is not by chance; it is perseverance blessed with grace.

Mere Knowledge of the Lord Is Not Enough: One of the striking points of this parable is that the master of the house, having locked the door refuses to open it for those who came after. “Lord, open for us” they cried. But the Master of the House replied from within: “I do not know where you come from.” They persisted with an explanation: “We once ate and drank in your company; and you taught in our streets.” Obviously, these people knew the master of the house, who is God in this context. But the Lord did not know because they were not His own, they were not doing His will. Therefore, he calls them “wicked.” Mere knowledge of God and of Jesus is not enough to save us. In Matthew 7: 21, Jesus said: “Not everyone who calls Me ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” Faith alone is not enough. it must be accompanied by good works (James 2: 14-18). There must be knowledge, faith, good works, and personal relationship working together. In Luke 8: 21, Jesus replied to the crowd: “My mother and brothers are those who hear God’s word and put it into practice.” Added to these, as the Second Reading (Heb. 12: 5-7, 11-13) tells us, we must be ready to endure suffering and not be discouraged in the time of persecution. We must learn to accept them as trials leading to the manifestation of God’s love and magnanimity.

My dear friends, Christ has won salvation for all “the nations of every language” so that all peoples “come to witness my glory” (First reading Is. 66: 18-21). However, we must work and walk our way through by faith, sacrifices, perseverance, and love. May His grace be sufficient for us all.