

## Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)

Reading I: Wisdom 18:6-9

Responsorial Psalm 33:1, 12, 18-19, 20-22

Reading II: Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19 or 1-2, 8-12

Gospel: Luke 13: 22 - 30

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/082122.cfm>



North, South, East, West

The Gospel passage begins with a question. "Will only a few be saved?" The Mishnah, a collection of teachings, presents the belief that all Jews would have a seat at the eternal banquet because they were part of God's chosen people. Blood relationships and religious/social practice were assumed to be what qualified one to participate and often did in human society. These people would have seen family as the key to all relationships. Others became related through sharing meals. If you ate and drank the same food, you shared common life. This attitude was behind the conflict when Peter ate with Gentiles and then stopped. The struggle is recorded in Galatians 1 and 2.

Some Pharisee groups opposed this and taught that only a small remnant would experience salvation. They saw obedience to the law as the key to experiencing salvation. Thus, the question is addressed to Jesus, who does not directly address it. Instead, Jesus calls people to vigilance, for only God knows the answer.

Jesus addresses the situation in a new way. It is not about to whom you are related, nor with whom you dined, nor about the law. The way to salvation is not through whom you know or with whom you socialized. Salvation is connected to a relationship with Jesus. It flows from a life that is lived with Jesus and reflects Jesus' care and compassion. This takes effort, conversion, and the action of God. This results not in earning salvation but in surrendering to God, who is the one who saves.

In living a life in harmony with Jesus, there will be a conflict with contemporary society. One becomes involved in the struggle for justice by confronting prejudice and challenging activities that are harmful to the climate and identifying issues that destroy life. The narrow gate is not an easy way to live. Rather, it takes effort, risk, and self-sacrifice. Most famous gates are large and wide where armies or parades would pass through. The gate of the heavenly reign is narrow and requires dedication and focus.

Jesus shows the radicalness of God's action in dining with tax collectors, who were despised because they took money from the Jewish community to support the Roman occupiers. Jesus challenged the social norms and invited each of his followers to do the same. The focus is not on one's standing or reputation but on loving as God loves. God welcomes people from every background into the reign of God. All are called, but entrance requires a response based on the gifts and abilities that God has given each person.

Jesus concludes with a challenge. The expectation was that those with a prominent place in society would have a prominent place in heaven. Jesus showed attention to those who were less prominent. He spent time with outcasts, women, children, and sinners. Jesus took the servant's position and washed the disciples' feet. Those who see themselves as important will not be important in heaven, and those who are the forgotten and outcast here will be recognized in God's reign.

Following the return from the Babylonian captivity, there was a renewal of Jewish identity. It was a time of purification to cleanse the community of the practices that had taken root in living amongst the different cultures in Babylon. This led even to the expulsion of non-Jewish spouses. In the first reading, Isaiah challenges this narrow vision that only Jewish people are included in God's plan. Isaiah presents a vision of people from every land coming to the Temple and even people going out (evangelizers) to tell others of the greatness of God. Even these people will come to God, and God will make some of them ministers in the Temple. God has a plan for all people.

The second reading highlights discipline in the Christian life. Just as every child must experience discipline to develop into a member of the family and society, Christians will also experience discipline as they learn to follow God. It is not a judgment of God but a course correction so that one may grow to wholeness. As a child learns not to touch the hot stove, Christians learn that compromising values, (telling just a little lie), does not lead to sound relationships nor growth in character.

#### Reflection Questions:

How have you experienced conflict with the expectations of others as you strive to be a disciple of Jesus?

What practices or resources do you draw upon to remain a faithful disciple in times of conflict?

What are the challenges in sharing the greatness of God with others?

What discipline have you experienced or witnessed in trying to live a Gospel-focused life?

#### Themes:

Salvation

Narrow Gate, the virtuous life

Universal call of salvation

Discipline

#### Prayer Suggestions:

For the Church: that we may draw close to Christ, who is the gate into eternal life and the way to wholeness

For grace to enter through the narrow gate: that the Spirit will guide us in living lives of forgiveness, compassion, self-control, and acts of service so that our lives may manifest the reign of God

For unity in the Body of Christ: that Christians from east and west, north and south, may work together in confronting evil, poverty, and disease so that the Gospel may be made known in deeds as well as words

For those working to promote racial and inter-religious harmony: that God will guide their efforts and help all to give witness to the dignity of each person