

25th August 2019 (21st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

Isaiah 66:18-21; Psalm 116(117); Hebrews 12:5-7,11-13; Luke 13: 22-30.

'... Enter by the narrow door!'

Luke presents us with three short parables or images describing our relationship with the kingdom of God. These parables are set within the context of the urgency felt by Jesus. Luke reminds us that Jesus is going to Jerusalem where he will face his death and resurrection, and that therefore the time is indeed very short.

At a first instance these parables are addressed to the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' time, who refused to accept the good news that Jesus is speaking about. These parables are a stern warning that unless they did something urgently, they were going to be left outside and miss out on God's banquet of the kingdom. Today these parables are meant for us; are we doing our utmost to participate in God's kingdom?

God is benevolent, forever kind and merciful. The Son of God has come to live among us to show us the face of the Father so that we may be saved. Through his life, death and resurrection – through his whole life here on earth – Jesus has brought our salvation; he has redeemed us and set us free. Through his life, Jesus has built a bridge that can bring us, weak and sinful human beings, to the Father. It is up to us now to step onto this bridge and become part of the life of God.

God has saved me and redeemed me, but I need to push forward to claim and participate in my salvation. If I am traveling by train and when I go to the station I notice that there is a large crowd of people waiting to board the train, I would do my best to place myself in a position to ensure that I am one of those who board the train, and I am not left waiting behind. Participation in the kingdom of God does require me to do my utmost to get on board.

God's mercy is not to be abused; time is running out for the scribes and the Pharisees and will also run out for me. I have been issued an invitation to participate in the divine banquet, but I do need to accept this invitation. The second parable or image is that of a householder holding a banquet or a wedding feast; the door is open to welcome the guests who have accepted the invitation. At some point the householder will rise up from the table and go to lock the door; it will then be too late for anyone to try to enter. It is useless to keep knocking at the door then, claiming that I knew the master of the house, because now the house is full and the door is locked! Hence again the sense of urgency and the need to make sure I catch the right train.

Some people may think that because God is so generous and merciful, it may be fine to take time before accepting the invitation and committing oneself to the kingdom of God. While God's generosity and mercy can never be doubted, lack of participation in the kingdom is seen as an abuse of God's mercy, and we will be very disappointed to realise that we are left outside!

The parable or image changes again and now we realise that the householder holding the wedding banquet is God himself, surrounded by holy people from the Old and the New Testaments, and by all our relatives and friends who have accepted the invitation, while all we can now do is to look on from outside because we have not pushed hard to get in at the appropriate time! How utterly distressing would that be! Hence the need to act now!

We need to push ourselves through the narrow door; we need to make sure we accept and participate in following Jesus and being part of his kingdom.

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