

# **21st Sunday in ORDINARY TIME (Year C)**

First: Is 66:18-21;

Second: Heb 12:5-7.11-13;

Gospel: Lk 13:22-30

## **THEME OF THE READINGS**

The texts of today's liturgy move between two extremes: on the one hand, the universal call to salvation, on the other, the great commitment on the basis of freedom. The Book of Isaiah (first reading) ends by making reference to the saving will of Yahweh for all peoples and languages. The Gospel, in turn, indicates to us that the door to enter the Kingdom is narrow and that only those who try hardest will succeed. The Lord accompanies us in this effort of freedom; he accompanies us with his paternal teachings, which are not devoid of corrections, though this is not the only form of divine teaching.

## DOCTRINAL MESSAGE

**Universal call to salvation.** The universal destiny of salvation was not discovered by the Second Vatican Council, but is contained within the very essence of the Word and Revelation of God: "God wants all to be saved." In the text of the first reading, in a wonderful vision, Isaiah sees the men of all nations coming to Jerusalem, the city of salvation, almost in the form of a liturgical procession, using the most varied means and bringing offerings to God. God has called and continues to call all, with no exceptions, because God is the Lord and Father of all. Can God call some of his children to salvation and not others? It would be absurd and not worthy of his divine fatherhood! Where there is a difference is in the means that God offers his children for their salvation. The text in Isaiah mentions that they will come to Jerusalem on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules and on camels. In other words, the ways to achieve God's salvation, symbolized in Jerusalem, are many and different. Today, the surest way is the Christian faith, although there is also the way of non-Christian religions. There is the way of ethics and conscience. There is the way of asceticism and mystical theology, etc. On the other hand, the universality of salvation does not allow for any exceptions on the grounds of peoples, languages, eras, social classes or professional categories, personality

(sociable, withdrawn, euphoric...), appearance (handsome or ugly, proportionate or disproportionate...), physiology (strong or weak, fat or thin...), etc. Everyone receives the call in the same way, but every human being will find his own difficulties and support on the way to salvation, which are at least partly related to appearance, personality, etc. What shall we do before this universal offer?

**The freedom of commitment.** On one occasion, someone asked Jesus, "Lord, are there only a few who are saved?" We know that everyone is called to salvation, but will everyone really be saved? In his answer, by using an imaginative and symbolic language, he tries to inculcate three fundamental truths in our heads: 1) the door to enter the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of salvation, is a narrow door. The door of the call is opened by God and he opens it to all, but the door of the response depends on human freedom, and not everyone is willing to enter that door, especially knowing that it is narrow. Jesus even tells us that there will be many who will try to enter the door but who will not succeed. Why? Because they try to go in burdened with many things that prevent them from stepping inside. Wanting to go in implies wanting to free oneself, and doing it for real. Without this will of self-giving and without this freedom of commitment, one

cannot go through the door of salvation. 2) Obtaining salvation does not depend upon religion or religious experience, or even mystical experience, but on one's conduct, on the works of salvation. It is not enough to be a Christian to guarantee salvation, because if we do not do the works of a Christian, we will hear God's voice say to us "I do not know you, I do not know where you come from." It is not religious experience (having eaten and drunk in his presence) that causes salvation. If it is not accompanied by works that spring from such an experience, God will be forced to answer, "I tell you that I do not know where you are from. Get away from me, you workers of iniquity." 3) Those who are saved will come not from one place only, but from all villages and from all the corners of the world. "They will come from east to west, from north to south, and they will sit at the table in the Kingdom of God." In all the corners of the earth there will be valiant and generous people who wish to enter the narrow door and who will do everything they can to succeed.

## PASTORAL SUGGESTIONS

**Admiring the teaching of God.** Among other things, the Bible is the book of God's teaching for the salvation of human beings. God as a teacher is symbolized by the

figure of the father. In other words, divine teaching is guided by the special love of a father for his children. The text of the second reading underscores an aspect of this teaching: correction. Is there a father who at some point has not been forced to correct his children? Sometimes correction may mean punishment, which teaches something. Although the child cries and stamps his feet, he knows that the correction or punishment is for his own good, and that they come from a father who loves him with all his heart. To guide people through the narrow door of salvation, God is sometimes compelled to resort to correction and punishment. In this way too, he is showing us his fatherly love. Rather than complaining, getting angry with God, considering themselves as victims, people need to admire the wonderful teaching on God's part, who with his providence is constantly watching over our life, follows closely all our steps and, whenever necessary, resorts to correction for our own good.

However, it is evident that a father cannot be reduced to a mere corrector. It would be a caricature of fatherly teaching and care! The father guides, encourages, arouses the enthusiasm of his children by the ways of truth and good. The same applies to divine pedagogy, which places within our reach numerous ways to awaken in us the profound desire for salvation, and guides us along the

path that leads to it. And he does this in an absolutely personal way, because God is not a mass educator, but the educator of his children.

**Salvation: God's initiative and our task.** It is impossible for us to save ourselves: God is the one who saves us. But God does not impose salvation, he offers it. God does not spare us the task of accepting it, thus being saved. It is not we who take the initiative of salvation, but God. However, it is not God who has the task of salvation, for this is our task. Initiative and task! What a lovely combination between a father who madly loves his children and his children who are concerned with behaving as such! If, in the impossible hypothesis that God decided to forgo his initiative to save us, he would be giving up his love as a Father, and his eternal plan on the destiny of human beings. If we were to give up our task of salvation, on the one hand, we would be giving up our condition as fallen human beings and, on the other, our eternal end and destiny. God's initiative pours security into our heart, and the certainty of salvation. The task of salvation makes us put our freedom at stake and decide to use it in union with divine initiative. All this is wonderful, but often we live our life without thinking about these things very much, perhaps overwhelmed by daily events. Sunday is a good day to think about all this, to stop on our daily path and think about how much life and eternity are worth. If

salvation were more present in our minor everyday tasks, wouldn't it change our way of living and acting? This is not the time for complaints! It is the time for action and hope.