

Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time – C – 2010
Isa. 66.18-21///Hebrews 12.5-13///Luke 13.22-30

--it was a gathering unlike anything they have ever envisioned....in our first reading today Isaiah describes it as an extraordinary event with people from all corners of the world

→citizens of every nation...entering God's house, from east and west...north and south...and all are worshipping on God's holy mountain...feasting and celebrating in His company

→invited by God....brought in by God...and to all of them God reveals his glory

→it's a stark contrast to what we hear in the Gospel reading today however...when Jesus talks about getting into heaven isn't it

→for those who had been handpicked by God...the Israelites...the select recipients of His salvation from the bondage of Egypt...this was certainly not at all what they had expected....

→wasn't it suppose to be an exclusive banquet with just a few guests....a few insiders's with a lot of outsiders?

...→wasn't it suppose **to be** only God's chosen people?

And then, in the Gospel....Jesus is asked...Lord, will only a few be saved? And Jesus answers..that only a few will pass through the door....

...it had to be difficult to accept God's openness to so many people and the reversal of what they had thought for so long....

→and yet even today we often ask the same question....*Lord, will only a few people be saved?*

PAUSE

“Lord, will only a few people be saved?” Against his mother’s will, his father had given him permission to enlist in the army before he was 18. He spent four years overseas in Vietnam and it emotionally scarred him for the rest of his short life--- alcoholism, a failed marriage, a severed relationship with his only daughter.

Although baptized he rarely went to church...and after a lifetime of neglected health, he died from respiratory failure at only 57...after his burial, a close friend and Vietnam vet asked how God would judge him and whether or not he’d get to heaven...*will only a few be saved?*

“Lord, will only a few be saved?” her younger brother had been raised as a catholic---theirs was a devout family where going to church was a practice that had always been a part of their lives. There were some problems in her brother’s life...the kind of sordid problems that had been kept secret...and then one week that all changed...he was arrested and all of those ugly secrets would become public and bring pain and disgrace to his family

--he was found only hours after posting bond; dead in his car having committed suicide...she spoke after Mass and in-between the sobs and anger, she asked if her brother would spend eternity in hell....*will only a few be saved?*

“Lord, will only a few be saved?” He attended his sister’s wedding held in the local park...although without his roman collar...almost everyone knew him as a catholic priest...his family was torn by her decision to marry outside the church...but they were all there to support her because they loved her dearly. She died three years later giving birth to her only child...just a few days after her funeral...her brother, the priest, was

asked by a family member if he thought she was in heaven because based upon the teaching of the Church she had lived in adultery....*will only a few be saved?*

“Lord, will only a few people be saved?” it was an important question that the stranger asked Jesus in the Gospel today...perhaps he had heard that heaven was “small” and he was worried about it....he didn’t want to be left on the outside looking in

→and he was expecting a precise answer [in the gospel today]...he was expecting something likea 10th of you, or 50% of you, or all of you...and so he had to be disappointed with the answer he got from Jesus that the gate would be narrow

→maybe he didn’t ask the right question...maybe he should have asked... “how do you get saved; or how do you get to heaven?”

→but instead...Jesus tells him that salvation....requires effort, strenuous and intensive effort---that it will be like squeezing through a narrow door...many will attempt it but few will be strong enough to get through

→that there should be a sense of urgency on his part and that he should seize the moment and strive agonizingly BECAUSE the door won’t always remain open

→that he should never get smug or complacent about salvation, because he may be surprised who gets in and who doesn’t

→and [that] for those who claim a special relationship with Jesus, those who ate and drank with him....well...Jesus had only one thing to say to them.... “I do not know where you are from.”

PAUSE

“Lord will only a few people be saved?” it’s a question to which we are all seeking an answer to as well...isn’t it?

→and the answer we always hope to hear from Jesus is... “no not just a few of you but all of you”

--you who go to mass every weekend and receive the sacraments...

--you who strive to live good lives and keep most of the commandments

--you decent people, who do your best; who get involved, serve others and share what you can afford...you! you are the ones who are going to get in

→but that is not the answer we receive is it?

→[the answer we receive is that] Salvation does not come from a mere physical closeness to Jesus does it?

→[that] it is not as simple as having membership in the church or just by going to Mass and receiving communion is it?

→[that] its not a matter of what we do or how hard we work to get heaven is it?

→no...as we hear...salvation from God is a gift...and so “*Lord, will only a few people be saved*” is hard for us to understand...its hard for us to grasp...because this salvation is gift from God...a gift that is given to us...and a gift that we have to accept in our own lives....PAUSE

→[in the end as we hear today] not all roads lead to the banquet...not all roads lead to heaven...there is only one road...one path and it goes...through one narrow gate – and so how do we get through it

Salvation comes when we accept Christ and start to truly follow him...when we truly...follow him as we leave this church today and every day in this coming week...

--when we truly follow him as we discipline our children and treat others

--when we decide how we will use our free time and spend our money,

--when we make decisions, when we pray...when we transact business in our offices, when we study in our classrooms

--and when we go about every other activity that makes up our daily lives
→everything we do, every word we utter, every thought we hold, every feeling we experience....proclaims to the world that we love Christ and that **we are** following him through the narrow gate

--in the end...the stakes our extraordinarily high BUT the last thing we want///// is to have the door shut in our faces and even worse to have God tell us... “I don’t know who you are and where you are from.”