

Homily for August 26, 2001
21st Sunday in Ordinary time Cycle C

By Father Charles Bowes

Isaiah 66:18-21
Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13
Luke 13:22-30

Not a few but all are meant to be saved.

Someone asked Jesus, “Lord, will only a few people be saved?” Are there limits in the reign of God? Does God have an upper limit for salvation (one hundred forty-four thousand)? Will God only consider applications from one creed or one communion? Are there limits to God’s charity, or patience, or forgiveness (seventy times seven)?

This initial question about the “few” to be saved comes from a world which saw reality as limited. For most people of the first century there was only so much to go around – so much wealth – so much power – only so much salvation. Competition was part of being religious just as much as it was in the economic sphere. Indeed the word “struggle” in verse twenty-four is symbolic of the entire era, since people were involved in a suffering understanding of reality. So, there were elites, who were “saved” in a variety of ways, and then there was everybody else. Resentment and unrest were part and parcel of the world. In other words, if we modern readers of this gospel are somewhat uncomfortable with the language of this material – the language of numbers how many and how often – it might well be because we perceive

reality in a more cooperative, a more inclusive way. After all, what sort of God would permit only a “few” to be saved? Is this the God of Jesus who apparently was quite inclusive in his table fellowship?

But many of us like to do religion by the numbers: one God in three persons, two complete natures in Jesus, seven sacraments, two thousand eight hundred sixty-five paragraphs in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Mathematics is a relatively safe science. If not exactly immutable, we still feel good about investing our confidence in it.

Jesus tries to divest his Disciples of a little of this false security. As one scholar says, Jesus wants them to know that it’s not enough to be acquainted with him and not his message. We want to be assured that if we follow the rules, come to supper, and keep our membership current, we’ve got nothing to worry about. How many rules, how many suppers, how many dollars does it take to get into the Eternal Banquet? Jesus says the Kingdom is not for sale. It’s a gift – and it will always be a gift open to all and available to all – the limit with which seems to be our capacity to receive.

And since this is a gift, this faith, this love God lavishes, we are called by our baptism not just to receive but also to share this gift, to let folks know that God loves them and is desperate to set free, raise up every human heart. So again this year, as in previous

years, we are reaching out to our parishioners and our neighbors in yet another section of our parish (we've visited about half the parish so far). Take a look at the paper available in each pew to see how you are part of this effort.

You can do this. I can do this. In fact it's something most of us do already - in the workplace, in our families, with our neighbors - sharing the faith we have in so many ways we don't even realize we're doing it - the listening ear, the helping hand, the unheralded kindness, the word of encouragement - that's mission every day. This is mission in an organized fashion which serves as a reminder and encouragement to share the Good News of God's love revealed in Jesus Christ. Because we do this focused, annual outreach as a parish, we are more apt, more able, more likely to share this spontaneously and even daily as individuals.

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