

Sunday, 22 August 2010 – 21st Sunday of Ordinary Time

“Do not risk being shut out!”

Reading 1: Isaiah 66:18-21
Reading 2: Hebrew 12:5-7, 11-13

Responsorial Psalm : Ps 117:1-2
Gospel : Lk 13:22-30

Scripture: *Luke 13:22-30*

He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. And someone said to him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" And he said to them, "Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the householder has risen up and shut the door, you will begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us.' He will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from.' Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from; depart from me, all you workers of iniquity!' There you will weep and gnash your teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves thrust out. And men will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

Meditation: What does the image of a door say to us about the kingdom of God? Jesus' story about the door being shut to those who come too late suggests they had offended their host and deserved to be excluded. It was customary for teachers in Jesus' time to close the door on tardy students and not allow them back for a whole week in order to teach them a lesson in discipline and faithfulness. Jesus told this story in response to the question of who will make it to heaven. Many rabbis held that all Israel would be saved, except for a few blatant sinners who excluded themselves! After all, they were specially chosen by God when he established a covenant with them.

Jesus doesn't directly answer the question, however; but his response is nonetheless unsettling on two counts. First, Jesus surprised his listeners by saying that one's membership as a covenanted people does not automatically mean entry into the kingdom of God. Second, Jesus asserts that many from the gentile nations would enter God's kingdom. God's invitation is open to Jew and Gentile alike. But Jesus warns that we can be excluded if we do not *strive to enter by the narrow door*. What did Jesus mean by this expression? The door that Jesus had in mind was himself. *I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved* (John 10:9). Jesus opens the way for us to enter into God's kingdom through the cross where he has laid down his life as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. If we want to enter and remain citizens of God's kingdom, then we must follow Jesus in the way of the cross. The word *strive* can also be translated *agony*. To enter the kingdom of God one must struggle against the forces of temptation to sin and whatever would hinder us from doing the will of God (even apathy, indifference, and compromise).

The good news is that we do not struggle alone. God is with us and his grace is sufficient! As we *strive side by side for the faith of the gospel* (Philippians 1:27) Jesus assures us of complete victory! Do you trust in God's grace and help, especially in times of testing and temptation?

Questions for community faith sharing:

Have you encountered any instances where you are tempted to compromise faith (e.g. due to peer pressure, norm, or worldly standard)? Did you manage to overcome it or did you succumb to it? How do you feel when you reflect on those instances?

Does being a member of church give you the priority to enter into His kingdom? What kind of quality do you think a real disciple has? How can we become a better disciple?

"Lord Jesus, help me to always trust in your saving grace, especially when I am tempted and put to the test. Help me to be faithful to you and give me the courage and strength to resist temptation, especially the temptation to compromise or to be indifferent to your word."