

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)
(Isaiah 66:18-21 / Luke 13:22-30)
25.08.2019

Dear brothers and sisters,

“Sir, will there be only a few saved?” This question put to Jesus in the gospel passage we have just heard is still relevant for us today.

There are different ways of understanding the question: “Will there be only a few saved?”

This question can express a fear. Does it not happen that we find ourselves filled with fear at the thought of the Last Judgment, when we think of the mistakes, flaws and sins of our past life? Guilt and shame trouble our minds and hearts. With all the mess going on within us, we cannot but ask ourselves: shall we be saved? When the final judgment will come, shall we be admitted into the heavenly kingdom for an eternal life with God and all our brothers and sisters in humanity? We believe that, if we repent, our past sins are forgiven in the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation. But if we are a bit scrupulous, or may be just honest, we cannot but be inhabited by this secret doubt: shall I really be saved? Does God, who knows me through and through, really look upon me with love? Has God truly forgiven me? “Lord, will there be only a few saved”? Will I be saved?

Jesus answers: “Try your best to enter by the narrow door”. What is this door? What is this narrow door? In the tenth chapter of St John’s gospel – the chapter of the Good Shepherd – Jesus says: “I am the gate” (door or gate is the same word in the original Greek text). The rapprochement of these two texts teaches us that Jesus is the narrow door. Only Jesus can save us. Salvation is a gift offered to us; it is given by Jesus. If we try to save ourselves, we shall not succeed. The narrow door which leads us to salvation is Jesus: by this I mean our relationship with Jesus, our trust in Him. Those who seek to be one with Jesus and follow his teaching are those who enter by the narrow door and are saved. This door is qualified as narrow because there is one God and Father, and one Saviour: the Lord Jesus. Beside this narrow door which leads to life, there is a wider door, a spacious door, one easy to find and one which looks more attractive, but this door leads to perdition. There are so many idols, so many false gods towards which we so easily turn our gaze in the hope of them saving us: other human beings, many things, and last, but not least, ourselves! Let us not be afraid. Those who believe in Jesus will be saved. If we believe in Jesus, we shall be saved.

Jesus continues to answer the question by referring to people who arrive too late and find the door locked. This is an allusion to the parable of the ten wedding attendants, more precisely to the five foolish virgins invited to the wedding feast, who went to buy some oil for their lamps and who arrived too late and found the door locked. The bridegroom arrived when they were away. The message is clear. The Lord is coming to save us here and now; we have always to be ready to welcome Him. We shall not be saved because we believed in the Lord yesterday. We shall not be saved because we have decided to believe in the Lord tomorrow. We cannot but think of St Augustine who was asked by the Lord to follow him and who answered: Yes, Lord, but tomorrow, not today!

If we want to be saved by the Lord, we have to stay awake because we do not know either the day or the hour of the Lord's coming. We have always to be ready to receive the gift of salvation from the Lord when He comes. Grasping the importance of the present moment is essential for us to be saved. This is part of the narrow door. If we are not ready when the Lord comes, we might be led to hear the Lord say to us: "I do not know where you come from".

At this point, the Lord continues to answer the question of his interlocutor by referring to another gospel episode. "It is not those who say to me 'Lord, Lord', who will enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who do the will of my Father in heaven" (Mt 7:22-23). If we want to be saved by passing through the narrow door, it is not just a matter of speaking well, but of doing God's will. Privileges are useless in this domain: We can say to the Lord: "We once ate and drank in your company; you taught in our streets" but the Lord will reply to us: "I do not know where you come from. Away from me all you wicked men!" What counts are not words or intentions, but acts. If we believe in the Lord, if we believe in the Lord day after day, and if we do his will, then we shall be saved.

"Will there be only as few saved"? This question can be understood in a slightly different perspective. Sometimes we would like to hear the Lord answer: Yes, there will be only a few saved. Because we are not at ease when we learn that someone has been reconciled with God at the last minute after a life which was far from being holy! Or we think that in order to be saved we need to be a member of our particular Christian denomination, or at least a member of our religion, or someone who thinks as we do. Yes, in fact, it happens that sometimes we hope that there will be only a few saved: for us this would be justice! This is a symptom of our narrow-minded way of thinking. The Lord's way is different to ours.

The two readings we have heard tell us that salvation is offered by the Lord to all people of good will. It is not because we have an official Christian identity card that we have a right to be saved. It is not because someone belongs to another religion that he or she cannot be saved. Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth and the life". Every person of good will seeking the truth and respecting life will be saved.

At the final judgement, "there will be weeping and grinding of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves turned aside. And men from east and west, north and south will come to take their place at the feast in the kingdom of God". The point made here is that nobody is entitled to the right, the privilege or the insurance of being saved. The point being made is that Salvation is a gift from God, offered to all men and women of good will who consent to enter through the narrow gate who is Christ, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life. This perspective is inclusive.

Will there be only a few saved? All those who die believing in Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life will be saved.