

Homily of Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

Isaiah's prophecy in the first reading: "... I come to gather nations of every language; they shall come and see my glory. I will set a sign among them; from them I will send fugitives (better translated as: survivors, messengers, emissaries, fighters) to the nations ... to distant coastlands that have never heard my fame, or seen my glory; and they shall proclaim my glory among the nations. They shall all bring all your brothers and sisters from all the nations as an offering to the Lord...Some of these I will take as priests and Levites ..." Every word of this prophecy was fulfilled with the coming of Jesus Christ and establishment of Christianity all over the world.

Before the coming of Jesus, the assumption among the Jews was that the kingdom of God was only for the Jews. The Jews believed that the Gentiles had no share in the kingdom. The questioner wanted to know from Jesus whether the Gentiles had any hope of salvation; or whether they were all damned. Jesus explained that the kingdom of God is not a privilege or a right of any one or any group or any nation, but for those who merit it by their striving.

As Christians, we have double responsibility. The first responsibility is that we are to strive to go to heaven since we are only pilgrims on earth. The second reading makes us to understand that as pilgrims, there are trials on the journey that cause us pain. The reading encourages us not to lose heart but endure the trials, and later enjoy the peaceful fruit of righteousness. The reading wants us to see trials as discipline or training. The reading exhorts, "So strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees. Make straight paths for your feet, that what is lame may not be disjointed but healed." Our destination and eternal home is heaven. Let no trials make us fall by the wayside.

Jesus asks in Mark 8:36, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Let none of us be among those who might be thrown out with such words, "Depart from me, all you evil doers!" May none of us lose his or her soul. Let us be among the people who will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and who will recline at table in the kingdom of God. Let us repent from any evil that can get in our way to eternal life.

The second responsibility of Christians is that we are, as Isaiah prophesied, the messengers (disciples) and priests sent by the Lord to proclaim his glory among the nations. We are to bring brothers and sisters from all the nations as an offering to the Lord. I imagine that when we return to the Lord, we will be expected to account for our brothers and sisters. For this task, therefore, we are to "strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees. Make straight paths for your feet, that what is lame may not be disjointed but healed." May we not disappoint the Lord who entrusted this mission to us.

Considering this responsibility, we can ask ourselves a few questions. Where do I see myself in Isaiah's prophecy considering discipleship, evangelization and witnessing Jesus to others? Can I boast of bringing anyone to the Lord in any way? Isaiah says that we are sent as messengers and priests to the nations and coastland to bring brothers and sisters to the Lord. For the majority of us who may not be sent outside our environment, the nations and coastlands are our family, our community, our neighborhood, our parish, our work place, market places, waiting lounge, and so on.

Moses' words to the Israelites are relevant for our reflection, "For this command which I am giving you today is not too wondrous or remote for you. It is not in the heavens, that you should say, 'Who will go up to the heavens to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may do it?' Nor is it across the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may do it?' No, it is something very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it" Deuteronomy 30:11-14). Jesus challenges us, "I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" (John 4:35).

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