

Homily of Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C, 2022

Isaiah 66:18-21; Psalm 117:1-2; Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13; Luke 13:22-30

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 the spread of Christianity all over the world.

We read in today's gospel, "Someone asked Jesus, 'Lord, will only a few people be saved?'" (Luke 13:23). Before the coming of Jesus, the Jews believed that the kingdom of God was only for the Jews, and that the Gentiles had no share in the kingdom. The questioner wanted to know Jesus' opinion. Jesus explained that the kingdom of God is not a privilege or a birthright of any one or any group or any nation, but for those who merit it by their striving.

Unfortunately, like the Jews before the time of Jesus, in many places, resources, positions, placements, and so on are not shared or distributed equitably and according to merit but according to privilege, might and power. Jesus invites us today to pray for the conversion of those who promote the vices of favoritism, discrimination, exclusion, and entitlement in our society.

We are only pilgrims here on earth. We are on a journey to God's kingdom. The second reading encourages us that as pilgrims, there are trials on the journey which cause us pain. The reading encourages us not to lose heart but endure the trials, and later enjoy the peaceful fruit of righteousness: "What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

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" (Hebrews 12:12-14). Let no trials make us fall by the wayside.

Prophet Isaiah, in the first reading, calls us messengers sent by the God to proclaim his glory among the nations and distant coastlands. Some of the messengers God has taken as priests and religious. God has mandated every messenger to bring brothers and sisters as an offering to him. This is to say that the journey to God's kingdom is not a sole and self-centered journey but a communal and collective journey. The communal and collective journey to God's kingdom is seen in the Lord's prayer, "Our Father who art in heaven ..." Not, "my father." "Give us this day, our daily bread." Not, "give me this day, my daily bread." Favoritism, discrimination, and exclusion are ungodly.

Isaiah says that we are sent as messengers to the nations and distant coastlands to bring brothers and sisters to God. We ask ourselves a few questions. Where do I see myself in Isaiah's message considering discipleship, evangelization, and witnessing Jesus to others? Can I boast of bringing anyone to God in any way? Where do I see myself in Isaiah's message in helping someone in need, or bringing joy to someone who is distressed? Can I make the needy and the distressed proclaim God's glory?

Only few of us God has taken as priests, religious, and missionaries who are God's messengers to distant lands. For the rest of us, the nations and coastlands where we are sent as messengers are our family, our community, our neighborhood, our parish, our work place, and the society.

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).

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