

Homily of Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C, 2025

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: messengers, ambassadors, emissaries*) 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.

Isaiah says that we are sent as messengers to the nations and distant coastland to bring brothers and sisters to God and to proclaim his glory. 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 the needy and the distressed see God's glory through me?

God has taken only a few from among of us 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).

The second reading reminds us that as God's messengers, we will encounter trials and difficulties in our missions and undertakings. The second reading encourages us to endure our trials and difficulties. The reading exhorts us, "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). Many times, trials and difficulties are rungs of life's ladder. Let no trials make anyone to fall off from one's ladder of life. We pray for God's grace.

Whether as messengers of God or whether we are pursuing our life's goal, we will encounter "narrow gates" that is trials and difficulties. But Jesus encourages us in today's gospel to "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, ... will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough." We pray for God's grace.

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. Jesus says, "For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last." Which is to say, some Gentiles who accepted the message of salvation would recline at table in the kingdom of God, while the Jews who refused the message of salvation would not be saved.

Sadly, as it was in the time of Jesus, so it is now in many places where resources, positions, placements, and so on are not shared or distributed equitably and according to merit but according to privilege, might, and power. Let us pray for the repentance of those who promote the vices of favoritism, discrimination, exclusion, and entitlement in our society. We pray that the concept of fair share replaces the vice of partiality.

It is even more sad that among us, many times, we inflict on one another with these same vices and sins we cry about that are happening in our society. On our own part, let us be advocates and instruments of fairness wherever we find ourselves. Jesus says, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you" (Matthew 20:25).

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