

Homily - 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time – C

Isaiah 66:18-21

Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13

Luke 13:22-30

Earlier this summer,
the Vatican issued a brief document, only three pages long, entitled:
Responses to Some Questions
Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church.
(The title is almost as long as the document!)

Because of the way the media reported on this,
I have heard many people saying:
“I can’t believe the Vatican is saying
you have to be Catholic to be saved!”
Well, the document doesn’t say that at all.
In fact in one place it states that
“the Spirit of Christ does not refrain
from using (these separated churches and ecclesial communities)
as instruments of salvation...”
Seems pretty clear to me:
the Holy Spirit uses separated churches and ecclesial communities
as paths to salvation.

What the document does assert is that the Catholic Church
is the Church established by Christ.
Not too much new in that claim.
We believe we’re right about some things
and that others are wrong about those same things.
Guess what?
That’s just what those
“separated churches and other ecclesial communities” think, too!
They think that they’re right about some things
and that Catholics are wrong about those same things.
Are they reticent to claim that? Not at all.
They became separated churches by protesting
that the Catholic Church was in error.

Do these differences matter?
Yes, they do!
If they didn’t matter, we’d all still be one Church.
The differences matter enough that groups within the Body of Christ
have split off, one from another.
Christendom is a divided kingdom and that is a scandal,
that we fail Christ’s desire
that we all be one as he and his Father are one.

The scriptures today also get at the question of who will be saved
and give us several answers.
Isaiah envisions God’s people being gathered together
to make one offering of worship, together, to the one God,
in Jerusalem.
Jesus echoes this when he says,
“People will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God.”

But he also says that the door into the banquet hall of heaven
is a narrow one.
What’s it to be, then?
Will only a few be saved by squeezing through the narrow door?
(in which case - I’m in trouble!).
Or will the banquet hall be immense and the table so long

as to accommodate all God's people?

Here's the answer:

the hall is big enough and the table long enough
to seat every man, woman and child ever created by God.
The door is narrow but remember: the narrow door is only an image.
The narrow door is not a door but an image of a person,
and the person is Jesus.
We will enter heaven through our relationship with Christ -or-
for those who have never known Christ:
through lives lived sincerely in love and justice,
such that they will immediately recognize Christ
not only as the door to life eternal
but also as the perfect mirror
of all that was good and true in their lives.

The question, then, is not so much,
"How many will be saved?" or "How narrow is the door?"
The question is much more
"Will I recognize the door when I stand before him?
Will my life and how I lived it, will my faithfulness to Christ
(at least my fidelity to goodness, truth and justice)
enable me to recognize the door and the One who it for me?"

Some of you may have heard this story:
A woman was praying and said,
"Lord, I would like to know what Heaven and Hell are like."

The Lord led her to two doors.
He opened the first and, looking in,
the woman saw a great table with many people seated at it.
In the middle of the table was a large pot of delicious, savory stew
with more than enough for anyone.
But the people sitting around the table were thin and sickly.
They appeared to be famished in spite of the feast spread before them.
They were holding spoons with very long handles
and while each found it possible to reach into the pot of stew
and take a spoonful,
the handle was longer than their arms,
and so they could not get the spoons back to their mouths.

Then the Lord opened the second door.
The woman saw exactly the same scene:
the same feast, the large pots of stew and the same long spoons
but here the people were well nourished and plump,
laughing and talking.
She said, "Lord, I don't understand." "It's simple," he answered.
"It requires just one thing. You see, these people know how to feed each other. They dip their long-handled spoons into
the pot
and feed each other across the table."

The door to heaven, through which ALL are invited to pass
opens to those whose lives mirror
the self-giving life and love of Christ,
to all who learned in this life to serve and nourish the neighbor.

Christ gave us the altar of sacrifice,
this table of his sacrament,
that we might "rehearse" for when we are seated at his table
in the kingdom of heaven.

Christ is the door.

Christ is the altar; Christ is the sacrifice.
Christ is the table; Christ is the supper.
Christ is the server; Christ is the food.
Christ is the bread and wine.

If you recognize him here, come and share even now
in the banquet he has prepared for you - and for all.

-Rev. Austin Fleming