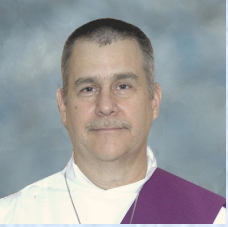


Homily Rerun: August 21, 2016 ~ Deacon Bruce



In the first reading, God states that He has come to gather people of all nations to see His glory. He will gather them from all over the world to be His own. The point is that God rejects any kind of rules or laws that limits the salvation only to some people. He removes any barrier that divides peoples and claims all as his own and fit for His salvation. This perspective of salvation is the main concern of Jesus. God's kingdom is open to anyone who wants to enter it. **However, entry is not automatic.**

All of us who are longing for God's Kingdom should strive to enter through the narrow gate. We have to remain vigilant. After all, the entry into God's kingdom is the result and the reward of struggle.

There is a Peanuts cartoon that shows Charlie Brown getting up one morning and looking out his bedroom window. It is a lovely winter day. Snow covers the ground. It is cold outside but perfect for playing in the snow. Charlie bundles up with several layers of clothes, big gloves and boots and goes to the door only to discover that he is so bundled up that he can't make it through the door. Charlie stands there frustrated and screaming.

We want to follow Jesus, but maybe we are too bundled up in possessions, concerns, attitudes and behaviors. Something holds us back from a deeper experience of God – perhaps, an addiction, an attachment, lack of trust, self-centeredness, or fear. So, like Charlie, we wind up standing at the door, frustrated and screaming. Unaided, few of us can make it through the narrow gate. With God's help, if we let Him, nothing can hold us back.

Being saved, or redemption, refers to the way we live now, not in the future. Our relationship with God starts now, not after we die. It involves being receptive to God's grace and being changed by it, and **wanting** to be changed by it.

Salvation is offered to all, but not forced upon anyone. If we do not seize the moment for what it is – a moment of grace in which to act – then before we know it, the time has passed and the door is closed. Every moment we live is an opportunity for grace, an occasion to take action as a disciple of Jesus.

God wants us to be saved, but he cannot save us without our cooperation. St. Augustine said, "God who created us without us cannot save us without us." We have to continually reform our lives through the hearing of the Word of the Lord, by putting it into practice, and by using it as an opportunity to improve our relationship with the Lord.

Jesus' answer to the question, "Will only a few people be saved?" is designed to make us think. Jesus is asking us to think about our choices. He wants us to make wise and profitable choices for our eternal life. Jesus is teaching that God does have expectations and that there are consequences to the way that we chose to act. Jesus is reminding us to stay on task – to do the work of God's kingdom as He Himself is doing.

We are called to be a "light upon the hill" shining on those who are in darkness and confusion. Will we be that light on the hill which diffuses the darkness and points the way to Truth and Love? Do we show compassion, patience and understanding to those who do not always live up to our expectations or our standards? Are we forgiving of others as we would want to be forgiven? Do we encourage one another in our common efforts to be faithful to the commandments of love?

Simply having a relationship with Christ is not enough. We have to put our faith in Him. We have to put our faith into action. It is not enough to just come and hear Jesus' words. It is not enough to eat and drink with Jesus in the Last Supper in which we participate in the Mass. It is not enough to do a few good deeds in His name. We have to do more than listen – we have to put His words into action, even difficult words like we find in today's Gospel. We have to do more than eat and drink with Him – we need to become what we eat. We need to become Jesus to others. We need to do more than do some good deeds – we need to live by His name and allow Him to work through us.

Faith is not just an act of the mind, but of the whole person. Jesus told us, "**You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your Soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.**" (Mark 12:30) We have to be totally committed to our faith and our relationship with God.

Jesus tells us "**Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.**" (Luke 12:48) We, as Catholics, are held to a higher standard, because we know better. We have been given the full means of salvation. We have access to the sacraments, the scriptures, and the magisterium of the church. Part of the Gospel message for the past several weeks has been that God will demand more from those who have been given more. Simply being members of the church isn't going to work for us. We are required to **live** the faith we profess. The church teaches that those of us who are Catholic – those of us who do know our Lord Jesus Christ – have an obligation to follow His commandments. We have an obligation to live as the church asks us to live. We are **required** to resist getting caught up in the notion that all things are permitted, and that there is no such thing as sin.

In the way we live our daily lives, we plant many seeds. For the good seeds we plant, sometimes we see the results right away, sometimes it may take time to see results, sometimes we never see the results. For some seeds, we are rewarded many times over by seeing the results of our efforts – children, or grandchildren grown, the ripened fruit of healthy trees. Some work we do, some seeds we plant, we may never see the end result. We must not be deterred or discouraged by efforts that seem unfruitful in the moment. We must continue the work of building the Kingdom.