

ORDINARY SUNDAY XXI "C"
August 24/25, 2019

Taped to the refrigerator door in my boyhood home was this little poem.

*When you get to heaven you're likely to view
Some people there whose presence
Will likely be a surprise to you.
Do not turn around and do not stare,
Likely there will be people surprised to see you there.*

This poem was placed on the refrigerator door by my parents as a reminder not to judge other people, a very valuable lesson. But, in light of today's Scriptures it can also teach about the universal nature of God's offer of salvation to all people.

The first reading from the prophet Isaiah coupled with Jesus' response to the person who asked him if those to be saved were to be only few in number (reflecting contemporary Jewish prejudice at the time toward all non-Jews [Gentiles] considered outside the confines of God's care), challenged narrow mindedness, speech and actions of the people of Isaiah's and Jesus' day, and some Christians today, who held that salvation, heaven, eternal life is a reward reserved only for the baptized or (as it is expressed in by some Christians) those who have "accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.

As Christians our vision of God can be too small. We forget God's desire of salvation for all people, a truth found in the very early manifestations of God's interaction (his covenant) with us. Abraham's covenant with God included the assurance that "in you *all* the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gn. 12:3). Psalm 117, the shortest psalm of the Bible, shares with numerous other psalms the promise that God's salvation, manifested especially in God's *hesed* ("steadfast love" and mercy) and *emet* (faithfulness) to the people of Israel, will be offered to *all* the nations. Isaiah proclaims that God's glory will be brought "to the coastlands far away that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the nations" (Isa. 66:19)." The Second Vatican Council (LG #16; AG#7) and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC #846-848) reiterate traditional Church doctrine that for those who having received the grace of faith and in conscience assenting to the revelation of God's offer of salvation in

Christ, there is no salvation outside of the Church. At the same time, both the Council and the Catechism assert that for people who have never heard the gospel, or whose faith and religious practice have not yet awakened them to the truth of God's salvation in Christ but who nevertheless seek to live lives of truth and justice, by means known only to God, salvation is also available to them. One of the Prayers of Intercession during the Liturgical Service of Good Friday we pray: "grant to those who do not confess Christ that, by walking before you with a sincere heart, they may find the truth."

For us who have accepted God's gift of salvation in Jesus through Baptism, more is required than lip service—accepting Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior. Asked, "Lord, will only a few be saved?" (Lk. 13:22) Jesus responded with a story about the narrow door. Not all who want to enter, who knock at the door Jesus says, will be given entrance, even if they ate and drank with him or heard his teaching. Presumption plays a part in those who believe they ought to be offered entrance through the narrow door because of who they are and not because of how they have lived their lives. Faith is more than lip service. It must shine through our actions. Mass does not end when we walk out of church. It is meant to continue by the giving of our body, our blood out of love in imitation of Jesus.

Today's reading from the letter to the Hebrews speaks about discipline. Goals of any kind are achieved not by "Monday morning quarterbacks sitting and discussing in their recliners" but by the hard work of practice, conditioning, and mental focus. So, too, eternal life. Daily prayer, regular participation in the sacraments, especially Sunday Mass and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, reading and reflection on the Scriptures, consistent effort to live a life of faith by the standards of the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, and the moral and social justice teaching tradition of the Church, are the "discipline" by which we enter through the "narrow door" into the Kingdom.

God's path, God's salvation, is intended for all peoples, from every nation who can knock on the door of the kingdom of God and gain entrance. God's way is for all humanity and the narrow door awaits all who seek it even those "*whose presence there will likely be quite a surprise to you.*" 25 August, 2019 *Father Jim Secora*