

## Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time year C

*Luke 13:22-30*

I am not trying to sound like a broken record...

It is just that we have yet another reading that makes one want to say: "Lighten up Jesus!"

A question is posed about salvation, and from Christ's mouth comes pure sweetness...:

- "Many will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough."
- "I do not know from where you are."
- "Depart from me."

*Whoa:* I suppose that means that we are up the creek without a paddle!

Before we yield to any despair, however, let us situate and probe this occurrence.

Notice how the opening question is askew.

Jesus comes to encounter and to be encountered.

With this question (surely posed on behalf of many), however, the encounter is missed.

This person poses a question about *statistics*.

"Will only a few people be saved?"

That is *not* the question!

The question, in the presence of Christ (as in the presence of anyone), is,

"Who are you?!?"

This question is

- one of basic politeness and more importantly
- one that is the expression of a mind avid to know, to *encounter*

Now, notice how Jesus does not even answer the question.

"Strive to enter through the narrow gate..."

Don't you love it?!?"

- the apparent rudeness of Christ...
- the playful freedom of Christ...

Jesus is actually being merciful with his interlocutor.

How?

Well, a direct, literal response, e.g. "Yes" or "No",

would have closed the door to further exploration.

The case would have been closed.

Instead, Jesus invites further probing.

An intrigued "Huh?!?" must have arisen in this person's mind...

Keep in mind something else also very important to understand what Christ is saying. Jesus is speaking to a *Jewish* audience, a Jewish audience for whom

- the *law* is of utmost importance.
- observance of the law is to be right with God

Now, we believe Jesus comes to save, i.e. to eliminate any and all barriers to love. But Jesus saves us by *loving* us, by loving us *unto the mystery of God*.

Such love, strictly speaking, is *beyond the law*.

Hence, the words of St. Paul (Romans 4:21):

“Now the righteousness of God has been manifested *apart from the law*.”

This divine love, and the divine intimacy to which it leads, which must be freely and unconditionally received, is *the narrow gate*.

We can try all that we want to save ourselves by

- observance of the law
- being good people

It will not work.

This does not mean that people who approach God in this way will not be saved (for God is able to come to and love us in manifold and secret ways).

But, strictly speaking, human goodness does not *produce* intimacy with God, ...at least not the intimacy which God so desires.

*God* brings about intimacy with God.

Intimacy with God is a *gift*.

And the consequence of such intimacy, *salvation*, is a gift.

And truly to receive such a gift, one must be *poor in spirit*.

i.e. one must completely *let go*, let go and let God.

And, frankly, it is probably much more difficult to be poor in spirit

than it is to try to obey the commandments

(in trying to obey the commandments, there is still some sense of accomplishment...).

Again, the gift of Jesus, the gift of divine love and intimacy,

which must be *received* with poverty of spirit, is the narrow gate.

This revelation was very difficult for Jesus' Jewish listeners.

Forget not what we read in Deuteronomy 7:6,

“You are a people sacred to the Lord, your God;  
he has chosen you from all the nations on the face of the earth  
to be a people peculiarly his own.”

Nor that “from them, according to the flesh, is the Messiah”. (Romans 9:5)

What a unique privilege.

But, as we all know

- from experience
- from the pseudo-Eden that is the world of celebrity

privilege can easily become presumptuous right,

and make it difficult to be open to anything else, to anything new.

Such is the case here.

Hence, the strength of Jesus' words.

If we are presumptuous in our relationship with God,

we become *as though* foreign to him, for presumption is foreign to love

And, consequently, presumption

- veils our true beauty
- suffocates the child of God in us

Amongst other things, Jesus is telling his Jewish listeners that their privilege is a gift.

It is a gift given by God who can freely give it to others.

Indeed, God plans to give it to others as well:

“Go into the main roads, and invite to the feast whomever you find.”

(last Thursday's gospel: Matthew 22:9)

His *chosen* listeners should have known the universality of the gift, for

when chosen by God – which we all are – we espouse God's concern for all humanity.

How odd: there is a narrow gate and yet the door seems to be wide open.

The door *is* wide open: the love is offered to all.

But the challenge of receiving the love narrows the door.

Let us ask for a spirit of receptivity, a spirit of poverty

that we might let our hearts be flooded with divine love,

and thus be irrigated and refreshed...