

21st Sunday of Ordinary Time
August 25, 2019

Readings:

Isaiah 66:18-21

Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13

Luke 13:22-30

Fr. Bob

The first reading from Isaiah and our Gospel reading seem almost contradictory.

The first tells about God's universal plan as he looks at the world that he's created.

It is said that he has come to gather nations of every language and that they will see his glory.

To all the distant lands he will give a sign of his presence.

It's a message about a God that is going to gather the world to himself and his covenant of love.

It's about a God that wants to embrace all of his people and not just a select few.

It's an ambitious task and only one that God could carry out.

In the very early church,

we see that message being debated among the first Christians as they wondered how those of Jewish origin and gentile origin could possibly be brought together as one people.

At first it seemed impossible, but the leaders were able to find a way, and others were invited in just as God had wanted with the even more ancient people of Isaiah's time.

Our Gospel reading has a much different tone to it.

As Jesus is travelling he gets a question from someone in the crowd as he passes by.

The person wants to know how many are going to be saved when he comes into his kingdom.

And the language becomes much different from the words found in Isaiah.

He talks about a narrow gate and how many people will try,

but will be unable to get through to the other side

. He talks about the wailing and grinding of teeth as many realize they will not be in the company of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as well as all the prophets.

The God of Isaiah that is looking to bring in all people,
seems contradictory to the God in the Gospel.

There is no talk of a barrier, a narrow gate that only allows a few to pass.

And to the people Jesus was talking to, others would make the passage, not them, but those from the east, the west, the north and the south, and they will be the ones who will recline at the table in the kingdom that God will provide.

And perhaps the problem, or the seeming contradiction lies with the people he is talking to,
and not the hopes and the dreams of God.

In the words he uses, the people have seen Jesus.

As we're told, they ate and drank in his company, just as we take bread and wine every week.

They say that he taught in their streets,

just as he teaches us every week in the scriptures we listen to.

And probably the list could go on to mention more things.

perhaps the people gave alms and looked out for widows and orphans.

Perhaps they served and supported their synagogue.

Perhaps they were good to their neighbors
. But for all the things that might have been good,

there is nothing said about the faith of someone like Martha,

who confronted Jesus about the death of her brother in another passage.

She was able to say that she believed that he was the Messiah, the one sent from God, the one who came to save them all.

She knew Christ.

She knew who he was and why he came.

She had love for him that came from the heart.

To those who had eaten in his company,

and had heard him teach in their streets there was one difference and it was an important one.

They didn't really know who he was.

Perhaps they enjoyed his company and found some of his words reassuring.

But they had missed the part about inviting him into their lives,
and allowing him to touch their hearts.

They may have been in his company, and they may have heard his words,
just as we do the same every week.

But they never allowed him to really change their lives and their hearts.

When they left his company, when they quit hearing his words, they had not changed.

And for them, finding salvation, finding God, or whatever phrase you may want to use,
is truly entering through the narrow gate.

But lives that are changed, and those that have truly invited Christ into their lives,
find that the gate is not as narrow as others would find it and the passage is easy