

21st Sunday of the Year C

So hold up your limp arms and steady your trembling knees and smooth out the path you tread; then the injured limb will not be wrenched, it will grow strong again. (Heb 12:12-13)



First Reading

Isaiah 66:18-21

The Lord says this: I am coming to gather the nations of every language. They shall come to witness my glory. I will give them a sign and send some of their survivors to the nations: to Tarshish, Put, Lud, Moshech, Rosh, Tubal, and Javan, to the distant islands that have never heard of me or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory to the nations. As an offering to the Lord they will bring all your brothers, on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules, on dromedaries, from all the nations to my holy mountain in Jerusalem, says the Lord, like Israelites bringing oblations in clean vessels to the Temple of the Lord. And of some of them I will make priests and Levites, says the Lord.

Second Reading

Hebrews 12:5-7.11-13

Have you forgotten that encouraging text in which you are addressed as sons? My son, when the Lord corrects you, do not treat it lightly; but do not get discouraged when he reprimands you. For the Lord trains the ones that he loves and he punishes all those that he acknowledges as his sons. Suffering is part of your training; God is treating you as his sons. Has there ever been any son whose father did not train him? Of course, any punishment is most painful at the time, and far from pleasant; but later, in those on whom it has been used, it bears fruit in peace and goodness. So hold up your limp arms and steady your trembling knees and smooth out the path you tread; then the injured limb will not be wrenched, it will grow strong again.

Through towns and villages Jesus went teaching, making his way to Jerusalem. Someone said to him, "Sir, will there be only a few saved?" He said to them, "Try your best to enter by the narrow door, because, I tell you, many will try to enter and will not succeed.

Once the master of the house has got up and locked the door, you may find yourself knocking on the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us,' but he will answer, 'I do not know where you come from.' Then you will find yourself saying, 'We once ate and drank in your company; you taught in our streets,' but he will reply, 'I do not know where you come from. Away from me, all you wicked men!'

Then there will be weeping and grinding of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves turned outside. And men from east and west, from north and south, will come to take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.

Yes, there are those now last who will be first, and those now first who will be last."

Meditation

"Are they few in number who are to be saved?" This question has been repeated through the centuries. Faced with the demands of the gospel or with the fact that millions never hear the gospel, laity and theologians alike have experienced a certain anxiety. The discussion often takes place in the atmosphere of certainty that we are on the right side. Yet the theoretical question concerning the number of elect is fruitless. We have been forewarned that the door which leads to salvation is narrow. What matters is to act, to do courageously all that lies within our power to enter. There are no guaranteed reservations that will assure us access to the banquet. We must not mistake the door. Neither ethnic identity nor religious heritage substitutes for life in Christ.

Our religious tradition tends toward one of two extremes. Either we rest smug in the conviction that baptism alone suffices or we suffer the delusion that we can earn salvation by spiritual athletics. The narrow door opens between these two.