

Ordinary Time 21C 2016

Who Will Be Saved?

For the past few weeks, we have been reading from a section of Saint Luke's Gospel that describes Jesus' great journey to Jerusalem, where he will suffer and die. As Jesus makes this journey, he challenges the large crowds that follow him to change and reform their lives lest they be excluded from the kingdom of God. At one point in the journey someone from the crowd shouts out a question that is on everybody's mind: "Do you mean that only a few people will be saved?" But instead of answering the man's question directly, Jesus encourages him to enter through the narrow gate because of the crush of people at the main gate. Jesus then turns to the crowds and warns them not to take anything for granted. For, even though they have followed and heard him, they will be locked out of the kingdom if they do not change and reform their lives.

Jesus supposes that the banquet hall of the kingdom of God will be filled with people of every race and nation, from north and south, from east and west. But he warns that when the kingdom comes, some who were first will be last, and many who were insiders will find themselves outside.

Salvation in Jesus Christ is God's gift to us. Through the death and resurrection of Christ we have been given the gift of new life—the gift of God's own Spirit. And because we possess this gift of the Spirit, we have the promise of

resurrection life, eternal life with God. We are the ultimate insiders; we are on the fast track, the inner lane. But today's gospel reminds us not to take anything for granted: We must not presume that God owes us the gift of salvation. We must not presume that we will be saved no matter what.

Some people delight in the thought that only a few people will be saved, as long as they are among the few. Others presume that everyone will be saved no matter what they do. They presume that God owes them the gift of salvation. But if salvation is a gift, God does not owe it to us. If salvation is a gift, we cannot presume it. If salvation is a gift, we can only hope and pray God will bestow the gift upon us.

Salvation is life, and life is salvation. Salvation is life with God, and without God there is no salvation, there is only eternal death and separation from God. If we do not live in God, our lives end at death. If God does not save us from death, death is victorious. If God does not grant us salvation, we cannot be saved.

Will only a few be saved? Will we be saved? Jesus says that the gift of salvation is for the many rather than for the few. But he also warns us to not to take anything for granted. He encourages us to enter by the narrow gate lest we find ourselves on the outside, where many who were first will be last.