

21st SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; Cycle – C; Aug. 21st 2022
Isaiah 66: 18-21; Hebrews 12: 5-7; Luke 13: 22-30

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

All the major religions believe in the immortality of soul and eternal life. But none of them is able to answer our curious questions such as, where is heaven? What type of life will we have there? Will all people be saved? Will we be able to recognize our dear ones there? Will we reunite with our spouses with whom we spent our life on earth? Will our pets be there with us again? And the questions go on and on. Eternal life always remained an anxiety and curiosity for mankind. At the same time all religions teach their followers that eternal life should not be taken for granted and it is a lifelong hard effort to achieve it. Among the religious leaders only Jesus could give us a rather vivid picture of eternal life. Still he too has not answered all our curious questions.

In today's first reading and the gospel the main issue is the eternal life or salvation, as who will attain it? The Jewish people were in exile several times and there they were living with the gentiles. Many ignored the purity of their race and got married with gentile women. After the exile when they returned to their homeland many men took their gentile wives with them. So the question arose about the salvation of those people. Hence through Prophet Isaiah, in the first reading, God makes it very clear that salvation is not the exclusive right of a particular race or religion rather God opens the same to all nations and cultures provided they co-operate with the plan of God.

Even during the time of Jesus the Jews never believed in the salvation of the gentiles. That is why in today's gospel someone, no doubt, a Jew, asks Jesus the question, **“Will only a few people be saved?”** **Through this question he was asking Jesus indirectly, “Is it not true that only the Jews are supposed to enjoy eternal life?”** Instead of answering this curious question directly, Jesus asked the man that instead of worrying about the gentiles he should give attention to his own eternal life and work hard to attain it. And also in the continuation of his discourse Jesus makes it very clear that just because one belongs to the chosen religion of God, does not mean that salvation is guaranteed. **Rather salvation is promised to anyone who lives a life in conformity with the Law of God, no matter whether he/she is a Jew, Christian, Hindu or Muslim.** When Jesus says, *“And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and recline at table in the kingdom of God”* – he means that salvation is promised to all people, no matter to what nation, religion and race they belong. All those who

strive to enter through the narrow gate will enjoy the eternal life. But Jesus also adds the fact that many will not be strong enough to go through the narrow gate.

In the modern age many take eternal life for granted. The survey shows that 75% of Catholics say they can be good Catholics without attending church every Sunday. Many Christians believe that eternal life is granted to everyone, no matter how good or bad you are. These people argue, “How can a merciful God condemn anyone to hell?” **Remember, God does not condemn anyone to hell rather the person himself/herself does one’s own condemnation by the wrong doings and choices.** God has given us the freedom of choice, by which I can choose eternal life or eternal damnation. God will never interfere with my freedom. The moment God takes away my freedom of choice I am reduced to the stage of animals. In St. John’s gospel we read, **“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” (Jn. 3: 17-18).** It is very important to notice that whoever believes in Jesus will be saved. If we think that just because we are baptized or by doing the bare minimum we can enter heaven, we are mistaken. Jesus says, **“It is not the one who calls me Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of God rather the one who does the will of my Father.”** It is the will of the Father that we may honor him and listen to the voice of his Son, our Lord Jesus. Jesus also says that there will be surprises in the kingdom of God. For the one who thinks that he/she will be the first to enter the kingdom may be pushed out of it or be the last. So what we need to do is to do our best doing good deeds so that we may find a place in the Kingdom of God. Life is short and this is the only opportunity we are given to work out for our eternal life. Once we miss this chance, we are not given with another one. We all take all possible measures to protect our life on earth which may last only a few years. We try to build up many things on earth. But the question will come from God, “What have you built for you in heaven.”?