**TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR C)**

St. Pius X (Giuseppe Sarto), Pope; Blessed Ramón Peiró Victorí, priest and martyr

Is 66:18-21; Ps 117; Heb 12:5-7,11-13; Lk 13:22-30

*Go out to all the world and tell the Good News*

**COMMENTARY**

*The Narrow Gate, but Open to All Peoples*

Today’s Gospel teaching continues with a tone of deliberate paradox, just as we “enjoyed” it last Sunday, to clarify some fundamental aspects of Jesus’ mission. The focus now is on the question of whether “will only a few people be saved?” raised by an unnamed “someone” who seems to represent every man and woman with his/her legitimate and commendable restlessness to have eternal happiness. Significantly, this question arose while Jesus was “on his way to Jerusalem,” precisely to sustain the passion, death, and resurrection, fulfilling God’s plan for the salvation of the world. Once again, Jesus took the opportunity to expound, starting from the image of the gate, the truths about humanity’s possibility of being saved.

*1. “The Narrow Gate”: A Heartfelt Exhortation*

Firstly, on the question of salvation, Jesus did not want to get into “statistics” about the few or many who are saved or will be saved. It is quite clear that God puts no limit on this, because He “wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth” (1Tm 2:4). It is therefore about God’s will that Jesus now accomplishes and fulfills. However, Jesus bluntly and without being populist affirms the need for humanity’s commitment to accept God-given salvation, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate.” Implied here is an entering the kingdom of God, and the narrow gate implies the possible difficulties and obstacles in the way because of the newness of the gospel. This exhortation actually echoes Jesus’ fundamental announcement at the beginning of His public ministry to enter the Kingdom, “The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mk 1:15).

Jesus shows himself to be not a demagogue who offers everyone the false hope of cheap salvation, but the true Teacher of God who reveals all truths about humanity’s path to salvation. Men and women are invited, indeed called, to make their own choice, in their freedom and taking responsibility for their actions. It takes an effort, a determination, indeed, a radical abandonment of all secondary non-necessary things, including material wealth, for the sake of the Kingdom, as we heard a few Sundays ago. And Jesus’ disciples, who continue His mission, will only proclaim God’s gift of salvation to all, without hiding the need for a strong commitment on the part of those willing to accept it.

In this regard, it should be remembered that Jesus himself will warn, “Amen, I say to you, it will be hard for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (Mt 19:23-24). This is an acclamation that caused the disciples great astonishment and perplexity, “Who then can be saved?” And Jesus’ response at that moment is also important for our reflection today: “For human beings this is impossible, but for God all things are possible” (Mt 19:25-26). The prevalence (or relevance) of God’s support and grace is a reminder , for men and women who find themselves in difficulty or even in the impossibility of entering the Kingdom. It is enough for one to make an effort, to strive to enter, without being too frightened by the narrowness of the “gate.”

*2. The Gate That Can Also Close: A Stern Warning*

Again bluntly, Jesus warns everyone about the very real possibility of being left outside the gate of salvation, “after the master of the house has arisen and locked the door.” The tone here becomes very stern, and the “master” of the succinct account of the parable even shows himself to be “merciless” without yielding to the pleas of the petitioners: “Lord, open the door for us,” “I do not know where you are from,” “I do not know where you are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!” Such dramatization (for indeed it is only dramatization) serves not to frighten the listeners, but to emphasize the seriousness of the situation. It is a matter of life and death! Better then to make an effort now to get through the door, albeit a bit narrow, before it closes!

Who are these “you” left out and how is this happening? Although St. Luke does not specify it here (and he might have meant the Israelites who refused to accept the Gospel of Jesus), we can glimpse from the parallel text in Matthew’s Gospel that it is the “lot” of all those who do not do the Father’s will, not accepting with faith and not putting Jesus’ teaching into practice, including even those (probably even among Jesus’ followers) who had performed miraculous deeds in His name (cf. Mt 7:21-23). The warning here is universal, for all.

*3. The Table in the Kingdom of God for All Peoples: A Consoling Affirmation*

Again, with a universal perspective, Jesus closes His discourse on salvation with the image of the table in the kingdom to which people “will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south.” This is the vision of universal salvation, already announced by Israel’s prophets, particularly Isaiah (whom we heard in the first reading). This will be the ultimate goal of the mission of God, Jesus and His missionary disciples of all times. And it will always be the mission of proclaiming God’s free salvation for humanity in Christ, without hiding the truth that such a divine gift nevertheless requires a necessary effort to accept it in conversion and faith in Christ.

*Useful points to consider:*

**John Paul II**, Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate, ***Redemptoris Missio***

5. If we go back to the beginnings of the Church, we find a clear affirmation that Christ is the one Savior of all, the only one able to reveal God and lead to God. In reply to the Jewish religious authorities who question the apostles about the healing of the lame man, Peter says: “By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well.... And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:10, 12). This statement, which was made to the Sanhedrin, has a universal value, since for all people-Jews and Gentiles alike - salvation can only come from Jesus Christ.

The universality of this salvation in Christ is asserted throughout the New Testament. St. Paul acknowledges the risen Christ as the Lord. He writes: “Although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth - as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’ - yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Cor 8:5-6). One God and one Lord are asserted by way of contrast to the multitude of “gods” and “lords” commonly accepted. Paul reacts against the polytheism of the religious environment of his time and emphasizes what is characteristic of the Christian faith: belief in one God and in one Lord sent by God.

Christ is the one mediator between God and mankind: “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth” (1 Tm 2:5-7; cf. Heb 4:14-16). No one, therefore, can enter into communion with God except through Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit. Christ’s one, universal mediation, far from being an obstacle on the journey toward God, is the way established by God himself, a fact of which Christ is fully aware. Although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value *only* from Christ’s own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his.