

21st Ordinary Sunday
August 21, 2022
“The Way Life Truly Is”

Is 66:18-21
Heb 12:5...13
Lk 13:22-30

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

I suspect that it's our basic human nature that makes us want life to be as easy as possible. We don't like pain. We try to avoid really grueling hard work. We want to make our life and our work as fulfilling as we can.

Most Americans have a fairly high quality of life. We don't give much thought to those who have so much less, here, at home – or in other countries. Many even look down upon the homeless, the addicted, and upon those we feel don't belong!

But how do we truly live the quality of life that we enjoy? Do we think that we, somehow, deserve it? Do we place maintaining that lifestyle above Gospel values? Do we search our hearts and ask: “What should we really be doing with all that we possess?”

The last chapter of Isaiah tells how the Chosen People failed while living the good life they acquired after the Exile. In a short time they became selfish and self-serving. They began to worship things instead of the Lord God. They went through the motions of religious practice – But it was all a sham! They looked down upon the poor and the homeless in their midst – They disdained foreigners and aliens – They believed that the Lord God cared for no one else except them – And their religious leadership – the priests and the Levites – were no better!

Isaiah's vision of a New Jerusalem was in contrast to all they believed. God cared about everyone. The Lord God wanted to be acknowledged, honored, worshiped, and loved by everyone! Furthermore, someday, God would bring together all the faithful members of the scattered people of Israel. And God would also gather every other faithful heart and soul to Himself – no matter what their race, color, language, or social class!

Jesus inaugurated this all-inclusive outreach during his lifetime. His Church has carried it forward over the centuries. This is despite the waywardness of many of its members as well as the failures of us who are the new “priests and Levites”!

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus warns us. He tells us to strive to enter through the “narrow gate”. It is our personal, selfish baggage that will keep us from eternal salvation. Consequently, we must divest ourselves of anything that distracts us from God and Jesus, himself.

That baggage can be anything and everything. It might be wealth, possessions, power, and control – pleasure, addiction to anything – our attitude, our close-mindedness – our hard-heartedness – our agenda – our timeline – the way we do things – the way we treat others – and the way we refuse to help when we can! In short, it can be anything that keeps us from living the Gospel – and loving God and others in a Christ-like way!

The Letter to the Hebrews teaches us that life is supposed to be difficult. Pain, suffering, and hardship are what God uses to test us – to bring us up short – to remind us that we are not gods! Because, often, it is only when we suffer deeply – that we look deeply within ourselves. Suffering strips away the facade of our personality – It reveals who we really are on the inside. Even our bad language, in our pain, tells us that we are not as “in control” as we thought we were! Moreover, when our relationships become difficult and painful – do we look into ourselves for answers? And if they fail – do we seek the unvarnished truth – or do we automatically blame the other party?

Not long ago, a TV host interviewed a man who was well-off and well-known. His relationship with God had been very superficial. He underwent a period of great suffering because of marriage difficulties – and problems with his children. At one point, he collapsed to the floor, reached out to God, and asked: “Why?” And a Voice replied: “Because this is the way it’s supposed to be!”

The man’s life changed in that instant. He realized that pain, hardship, and suffering are part of life. But he also realized: that we have a God of love and mercy – That God knew him and cared about him – That he was important to God – That his own role as a human person was to live a life faithful to God no matter what he had to face!

Brothers and Sisters, this is the way each of us must live.

So, let us pray that we keep God always before us –
May we exclude no one from God’s mercy and love –
May God help us to be free of whatever baggage we continue to carry –
And may we be admitted through the narrow gate into the Kingdom of eternal life!

Amen.

August 21, 2022

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