

## 21st Sunday (C)

- *Extra ecclesia nulla salus est.* The Christian church officially taught this in the 15th century - outside the church there is no salvation.
- It was understood that baptism was necessary for salvation.
- It was taught at a time when it was believed that the Gospel by this stage had been preached to the whole world & that therefore anyone who rejected the gospel, rejected Christ, rejected baptism & then logically, rejected God's offer of salvation.
- This had to be rethought when only a few years later - Christopher Columbus discovered the Americas - a continent on which millions of people lived who had not heard of Jesus Christ.
- The Conquistadors had their own solution to the problem; there are many stories of how they baptised the pagan Indians on masse before massacring them.
- Today the teaching of the Church on salvation is different - that all people of all religions, as well as secular humanists, even atheists, who sincerely follow the dictates of their own formed consciences have access to God's universal offer of salvation - it is Church teaching now that our relationship to all people who share the best of human values must be characterised by acceptance, collaboration, dialogue and charity.
- People don't have to formally belong to Church to be offered eternal life with God; this however does necessitate that people strive to live with hearts set on goodness & generosity.
- The you could ask the question, why belong to Church; why be baptised?
- God's offer of eternal life is for everyone because we are all created by God & destined for communion with God, but that is not forced upon us - we are called to respond, & the way we do is by the way we live our lives; in the concrete circumstances of our lives - in the way we treat others & our world - the church's responsibility is to enable people to live in communion with God & with one another in the here & now.
- If we believe that heaven is about living in peace & harmony with one another, then it would be a good idea to strive to live that future now.
- In that sense, the aim of all baptised people should be about furthering God's kingdom in our world in all the different areas our different lives touch. The question in the Gospel posed to Jesus is an ultimate one about life itself: Jesus' answer is full of hope - He hasn't come for a remnant or a select few, he has come to draw everyone without exception to God. However, Jesus is not interested in theoretical questions such as he has been asked or in idle speculation. so, before replying, he tells the person asking the question: 'Try your best to enter by the narrow door'.
- In a sense every path is a narrow one, for to decide to go in one direction is to decide against every other direction.

- To take one path is to decide not to take other paths.
- The life of the soul – our inner life isn't handed to us on a plate & we can't find it by just waiting for it.
- The question is - do I live my life with a sense of the bigger picture with a vision of the future - do I actively participate in God's dream for us?
- What we do in this life has eternal ramifications.
- As someone who is baptised & believes in God's intentions for us, do I live as an authentic witness to salvation?
- Jesus' warning about the narrow gate, the possibility of being left out, comes down to this: Our present life is serious - & the stakes are enormous. The last minute will be too late.
- We need far more than a passing acquaintance with God & with Christ's teaching to be saved; we need to begin working out our salvation early in life if we expect to be saved - this is Jesus message.
- Are the concrete choices I make everyday in life self-centred & short-sighted or are they for God for others & for goodness?
- In our own time Christ's message challenges us - in the world & in the Church we can be intolerant of one another & we cannot be therefore true to the message of the Good News to others who need to hear it from us as Christians.
- For the Jews of Jesus' time, the greatest failure of their religion was that rather than it being the way to live out their relationship with God & one another, it became an end in itself, a god in itself & various interpretations of their religion became sources of factions & divisions among them – there developed an intolerance of one another.
- All too often people develop a love for their own ideas, theories, social codes, interpretations of events in the world & theologies, more than their love for other people.
- We continue to see this being expressed as wars in Iraq, Afganistan, the Middle East, Africa, Asia – in fact in all continents of the world.
- The history of the Christian Church is not exempt because it has been tainted with intolerant people who have believed that their way, their thinking is right. What the world most desperately needs from us who call ourselves Christian or Catholic is a love of God exemplified in our relationships with one another.
- If we do not strive for show God's love & care for all, our Church's mission & ministry will suffer & we will continue to be a stumbling block to a world of peoples who are in need of hope, justice & freedom from the intolerance of narrow-minded people.
- The kingdom of God will appear to the extent that others can say, "See how those Christians love."