

August 24, 2025
21st Sunday in Ordinary Time
Luke 13:22-30

Jesus passed through towns and villages, teaching as he went and making his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, “Lord, will only a few people be saved?”

He answered them, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough.”

“After the master of the house has arisen and locked the door, then will you stand outside knocking and saying, ‘Lord, open the door for us.’ He will say to you in reply, ‘I do not know where you are from.’ And you will say, ‘We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets,’ Then he will say to you, ‘I do not know where you are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!’ “And there will be wailing and grinding of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves cast out. And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God. For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”

Background:

Last week the Gospel presented an atypical image of Jesus. In the first verse of that Gospel Jesus said that he came “to set the earth on fire” (Luke 12:49). The text went on to describe the divisions among Christian families that were beginning because of their acceptance of Jesus’ teachings and values. Luke then describes Jesus exhorting the people in the crowd, who know how to interpret signs in the weather but not their own situation.

The first verses of chapter 13 of Luke’s Gospel describe Jesus addressing the crowds. First, he responds to those who look upon others as sinful because of some tragedy. Then Luke follows that with three of Jesus’ parables. The first uses a barren fig tree to reveal the compassionate patience of God. The second uses a mustard seed example to speak of God’s ability to accomplish greatness with the smallest of seeds. The third focuses on undetectable yeast that is present in the whole measure of dough. Following these three parables the tone of Luke’s Gospel shifts, as Jesus begins his journey toward Jerusalem. After that comes the text that is the Gospel for this Sunday.

The Gospel text begins by simply stating that Jesus had “passed through towns and villages... making his way to Jerusalem,” and someone approaches Jesus (Luke 13:22). Like the towns and the villages to which Jesus traveled, the person also is unnamed. Using their names would be distractions from the question that is being asked. But in a familiar fashion, Jesus redirects the focus of the question from curiosity to the more significant question of who will find themselves among the kingdom of God.

As Judeans of Jesus’ day, most presumed that they were part of God’s chosen people, and therefore assumed they would be part of God’s final realm. The Pharisees, however, held that only a remnant few would be included in the final reign of God. Much of the life and culture of the day was concerned with knowing who belonged within the in-group, and who was not. Knowing one’s status also defined to whom one owed allegiance, and who was to be avoided. Those outside that group were viewed as potential threats to the well-being of one’s primary group. One’s family was part of this in-group by the fact that one shared blood with them. The sharing of other bodily fluids (blood, saliva, semen, or milk) also created a bond between people. In this culture each was looked upon as a brother or sister and not as a potential marriage partner.

Another way of establishing a bond between people was through eating together. Throughout both the Christian and Hebrew scriptures, the significance of who is present at the table and at banquets is often a topic of discussion and a symbol used for instruction. Significant examples of table fellowship found within the scriptures include:

- the Passover,
- Abraham's meal with the two strangers,
- Jesus dining with the tax collector, Zacchaeus,
- Jesus' meals with the disciples after the resurrection, and
- Peter's eating with the gentile converts who were not circumcised, and then refusing to eat with them after he received criticism for eating with non-Jewish Christians. (This becomes very important to Paul and the whole Christian community.)

The parable Jesus tells in this Gospel challenges those who think they know who will be included—those who believe that they should be admitted because they have shared meals. But twice in the parable the master says to those outside, “I do not know where you come from.” The parable also indicates that among those who are presumed not to be welcomed, there are some who have been welcomed. The parable concludes, “And people will come from the east and the west, and the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God.” (Luke 13:29)

This is a way of saying that people from all nations and ways of life will be part of the final age. It is important to note that some, among those who believe they are part of the household, will find themselves on the outside. Some, who some might presume to be outsiders will be included and welcomed. The emphasis is striving to enter through the narrow gate and not on membership in a particular group. The narrow gate of the city was the gate through which only a single person could enter. For the Christians for whom Luke is writing, that narrow gate is a person, Jesus Christ.

Reflection Questions:

1. Where do you experience people being treated as insiders or outsiders?
2. Do you have experiences of being treated as an insider and/or an outsider? How does that experience affect you and your relationships with others?
3. Do you know people who are especially good at making people feel like insiders? How do they do that?
4. What do you hear underlying the question, “Lord, will only a few people be saved?” How would you like to respond to that person?
5. Toward the very end of the Gospel Jesus tells the crowd, “And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God.” What do you hear Jesus saying to you?
6. Can you take some time now to talk with God about how you are feeling as you hear Jesus talk about those who are included, your own concern for who might be part of God's reign, or your own fears and hopes of being part of the final reign of God?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscclledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for August 24, 2025, the Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Thus says the Lord: I know their works and their thoughts,
and I come to gather nations of every language; they shall come and see my glory.
I will set a sign among them; from them I will send fugitives to the nations:
to Tarshish, Put and Lud, Mosoch, Tubal and Javan, to the distant coastlands
that have never heard of my fame, or seen my glory;
and they shall proclaim my glory among the nations.
They shall bring all your brothers and sisters from all the nations as an offering to the Lord,
on horses and in chariots, in carts, upon mules and dromedaries, to Jerusalem, my holy mountain,
says the Lord, just as the Israelites bring their offering to the house of the Lord in clean vessels.
Some of these I will take as priests and Levites, says the Lord.

Go out to all the world and tell the Good News.
Praise the Lord all you nations; glorify him, all you peoples!
For steadfast is his kindness toward us, and the fidelity of the Lord endures forever.

Brothers and sisters, You have forgotten the exhortation addressed to you as children:
"My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when reprov'd by him;
for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines; he scourges every son he acknowledges."
Endure your trials as "discipline"; God treats you as sons.
For what "son" is there whom his father does not discipline?
At the time, all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain,
yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it.
So strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees.
Make straight paths for your feet, that what is lame may not be disjointed but healed.

Jesus passed through towns and villages, teaching as he went and making his way to Jerusalem.
Someone asked him, "Lord, will only a few people be saved?"
He answered them, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate,
for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough.
After the master of the house has arisen and locked the door, then will you stand outside knocking
and saying, 'Lord, open the door for us.' He will say to you in reply, 'I do not know where you are from.
And you will say, 'We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets.'
Then he will say to you, 'I do not know where you are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!'
And there will be wailing and grinding of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves cast out.
And people will come from the east and the west
and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God.
For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

Excerpts from Isaiah 66:18-21; Psalm 117:1-2; Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13; and Luke 13:22-30

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for August 24th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. In the Gospel from Luke, Jesus responds to the question, "Lord, will only a few people be saved?" He answers, "Strive to enter through the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough. People from the east and the west and the north and the south will recline at table in the kingdom of God. Behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

The other readings also have references to the gathering of peoples from all the nations, and proclaiming the Lord's glory, and the righteous reward earned by the children from near and far who endure the discipline of the Father. In the first reading from Isaiah, thus says the Lord: I know their works and their thoughts, and I come to gather nations of every language. They shall proclaim my glory among the nations. Psalm 117 exclaims, "Praise the Lord, all you nations, for steadfast is his kindness toward us!" In the second reading, we hear from the letter to the Hebrews: "You have forgotten the exhortation addressed to you as children: "My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord. Endure your trials as "discipline;" God treats you as sons. Later the discipline brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it."

"Many will attempt to enter after the master of the house has arisen and locked the door," Jesus tells the people. "You will stand outside knocking and saying, 'Lord, open the door for us. We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets.' He will say to you in reply, 'I do not know where you are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!' People will come from the east and west and north and south, and will recline at table in the kingdom of God. There will be wailing and grinding of teeth when you yourselves are cast out. Strive to enter through the narrow gate!"

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!