



Twenty First Week Ordinary Time

Isaiah 66:18-21 Hebrews 12: 5-13 Luke 13: 22-30

There's something about a procession that catches our imagination and draws us in. Crowds streaming along a street; floats and music, even city to surf races, there's a sense of community if only for a few minutes. There are also solemn processions of mourners accompanying the deceased to their final resting place.

In our liturgies processions play an important part. The procession at the beginning of Mass symbolises our coming together from the various parts of the parish willing to be brought into communion with our brothers and sisters.

We process to receive the body and blood of Jesus aware that as family we are fed from the same source. Augustine reversed the usual order when he said that instead of the food becoming stuff of our stuff we become the food, that is, when we receive communion we are incorporated into Christ.

The prophet Isaiah describes a great procession. He saw God summoning all people, not just a few chosen ones, but all people. We are called to come to God's holy mountain. That is another way of saying that we are called into God's presence.

Jerusalem, because of its location on a fortified hill and its association with the temple is another symbol of God's presence. That is why it is used so often in the Psalms. In the Gospels the writers use the image of journey. Jesus is depicted as travelling towards Jerusalem. One the way Jesus talks to people about their lives, especially their inner life.

Someone asks if there are any limits God must place on divine saving love. Jesus responds with a story. A parable, like most eastern stories, is like a hard toffee or even a coconut, it takes some wrestling to get at the flavour.

The story speaks of narrow doors and being shut out (a fashion shop once had a half width door clearly indicating that they only stocked sizes for the very slim) and of an owner who says "I don't know where you come from." We use the expression, "I don't know where you're coming from", when we mean we don't understand the point of view.

This suggests that some people who claim to be friends of God are missing the point about God's vision of the world, created in love, and created for harmony. What does this say to us? Is it possible to think we are good Christians and actually get it wrong?

Some say that if we pray that's all we need. How do we know if our prayer is Christian? As Jesus said, "Not everyone who says, Lord, Lord is part of the

kingdom.” To know Jesus and to get to know his vision is first and foremost to know the scriptures, particularly the New Testament. This means we have to do some study. We wouldn’t expect to understand another culture by knowing a couple of stories or know the words to a song. Today we are very fortunate to have access to very good scholarship about the Bible and at several levels so that we can start with something straight forward and progress from there. Our tradition has always situated scripture study in the context of community. This does not have to be physically present but means we are discerning from the wealth of material available. As Catholics we believe that we encounter the Word of God in human words and so texts are culturally, and geographically conditioned. Not every sentence of the Bible is of equal value, for example the accounts of battles in the Jewish scriptures are of different value than the account of the Beatitudes which is a foundational Christian text.

Each generation of Christians learns from those who have gone before and each generation contributes something to the education of future generations. Both First and New Testaments tell us that God calls all of us into one loving family and so we love and respect all peoples regardless of their beliefs. We can guarantee that such tolerance is a mark of true discipleship.

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