

August 25th, 2019, 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

Isaiah 66:18-21

Contained within God's first promise of his election of Abram and his descendants is the information that "All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you." (Gen 12:3) This promise is actually fulfilled through Jesus Christ.⁶ Today's passage comes from the final chapter of the book of Isaiah which really does not end, because its closing lines open unto a new heaven and a new earth in which men of every race eternally live to praise the Lord of salvation.² In this selection we see the glory of the Lord appearing before all nations. The "sign" may be the Jewish Diaspora (those who have left Israel and moved to various parts of the world) spread through the world and always protected by God. Then we glimpse a triumphal procession converging upon Jerusalem from all directions.¹

Thus says the Lord:

18 I know their works and their thoughts, and I come to gather nations of every language; St. Clement of Rome also sees this verse as an announcement of the Second coming of our Lord.⁷ **they shall come and see my glory.** Theodoret of Cyrus reads these words as an announcement of the universal salvation that stems from the Incarnation, and he comments that Isaiah here showed that Christ became "a slave not only to redeem the Jews but to bring salvation to all the nations."⁷

19 I will set a sign among them; This sign may be the Jews in Diaspora, scattered throughout the world.³ We can also interpret this sign as the Church for the Second Vatican Council explains how the Church must be a sign and give testimony to the Truth amid other religions.⁸ **from them I will send fugitives** Many nations and people will go against Jerusalem and God will bring his wrath against them and send those who escape as missionaries to all those foreign lands.⁵ These people will carry the word of God's glory to the distant lands. **to the nations:** From Genesis and Ezekiel the inspired author draws up a list of foreign peoples, vague and wonderfully symbolic of all the world.² **to Tarshish,** This is in southern Spain.¹ **Put and Lud,** These are in Africa.¹ **Mosoch,** We do not know this location, but it may be in Asia Minor.³ **Tubal** This is near the Black Sea.¹ **and Javan,** While this is located in the Ionian Islands, it frequently signifies Greece.¹ **to the distant coastlands that have never heard of my fame, or seen my glory; and they shall proclaim my glory among the nations.**

20 These lands will bring back to Jerusalem the scattered members of the chosen people as an offering to the Lord.³ **They shall bring all your brothers and sisters from all the nations** The new Israel is the community of all believers—the Church.⁶ The Catechism explains the link between the Church of the New Covenant and the Jewish people who were the first to hear the Word of God. The Jewish faith, unlike other non-Christian religions, is already a response to God's revelation in the Old Covenant. To the Jews belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.¹⁰ (CCC 839) **as an offering to the Lord, on horses and in chariots, in carts, upon mules and dromedaries, to Jerusalem, my holy mountain,** Jerusalem is seen as the spiritual center of the world and Zion, the central mountain of Jerusalem, eclipses Sinai and becomes the holy mountain of God. Zion is where the Upper Room was—the room where Christ's Church was born.⁶ The exile in Babylon will come to be seen as divine punishment inflicted on the people for their sins, for their breaking the Covenant. Here, God, in his mercy towards his people, will pardon them and have them come back to his "holy mountain", Jerusalem, and this gathering will also involve "all nations and tongues." This return to Zion is a sign that their transgression is totally forgiven.⁷ We glimpse a triumphal procession converging upon Jerusalem from all directions.¹ In poetic language Isaiah makes very clear how

all-encompassing God's intention is for the redemption and salvation of all humankind throughout the world.⁴ **says the Lord, just as the Israelites bring their offering to the house of the Lord** The "house of the Lord" was the Temple, the architectural sign of the Davidic covenant, a building where all people of the earth were invited to worship the God of Israel.⁶ **in clean vessels.**
21Some of these I will take as priests and Levites, says the Lord. This final line is unclear; those chosen as priests and Levites could be the diaspora Jews, or they could be the Gentiles who come with them.³ Either interpretation fits in with the general newness and universalism that are a feature of this chapter.⁷ The New Law makes no distinction between Jews and non-Jews for it is truly and perfectly a Law for all mankind.⁶

Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13

This teaching is supported by the quotation from Proverbs 3:11-12: "The discipline of the Lord, my son, disdain not; spurn not his reproof; for whom the Lord loves he reproofs, and he chastises the son he favors." In the present passage the father is identified with God and we with the sons whom he is addressing.⁹ This letter was addressed to Christians who had been believers for a while. Though they were not experiencing overt persecution, they were growing tired of the daily struggle. This struggle may have included rejection by their neighbors and the normal difficulties of living the gospel in a society that operates on other values. In other words, the letter was addressed to people much like ourselves.⁵

Brothers and sisters,

5You have forgotten the exhortation addressed to you as children, Through Baptism a person becomes a child of God.⁹ **"My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when reproved by him;** This term "discipline" does not convey the full richness of the original Greek word which has to do with the educational upbringing of child by parent, of pupil by teacher, and also the punishment meted out in this context. God should be seen as a good father who brings up his children in an affectionate yet firm way. Adversity and suffering are a sign that this divine teaching method is at work.⁹ Who loves his child more, the father who allows the child to do what will harm him or the one who corrects, trains and even disciplines the child to help him learn what is right?⁵

6for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines; he scourges every son he acknowledges."

7Endure your trials as "discipline"; There are several ways that we can respond to this discipline: 1) we can accept it with resignation; 2) we can go into self pity, thinking we do not deserve it; 3) we can be angry, resentful, and bitter at God for it; or 4) we can accept it gratefully as a proper response from a loving Father.⁵ **God treats you as sons. For what "son" is there whom his father does not discipline?** In human development we go from dependence to independence but as sons of God, the more we become detached from sin, the stronger our dependence on God our Father.⁸

11At 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.

12So strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees. The world of athletic competition was referred to at the beginning of the chapter. This verse is like a shout of encouragement to a runner who is beginning to flag in the middle of a race. The author uses a quotation from Isaiah (35:3) in which drooping hands and weak knees indicate moral decline.⁹

13Make straight paths for your feet, that what is lame may not be disjointed but healed. These words "to make straight paths for your feet" from Proverbs 46 encourage right living and take us to the familiar imagery of the road on which the people of God must journey. If the Christian perseveres in his efforts even if he is somewhat "lame", that is ' even if he is someone whose faith is weak and is in danger of apostasy, he will be able to return to fitness in spite of everything.⁹

Luke 13:22-30

22 Jesus, passed through towns and villages, teaching as he went and making his way to Jerusalem. As Jesus heads towards his crucifixion and rising, his main activity is prophetic teaching.¹²

23 Someone asked him, "Lord, will only a few people be saved?" Generally speaking, the Jewish people regarded themselves as the sole beneficiaries of the messianic promises made by the prophets; but Jesus proclaims that salvation is open to everyone!¹⁴ The following parable was basically an appeal to the Jews to accept Jesus as their Messiah and enter His Church before it was too late.¹³

24 He answered them, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, Entry into the Kingdom can never be automatic. The word "strive" means that it takes effort.³ Those who are unable to enter through the narrow gate are those who refuse to give up their cumbersome luggage. Intellectually, they cling to their prejudices, their "isms," and their ideas. Morally, they refuse to renounce their selfish ease, their materialistic way of life, unjust profits, and carnal pleasures.⁸ for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough. This suggests that "the few" will have to contend with "the many" for entry through a space too narrow in a time too short.¹² Salvation depends first on God's grace, then on our cooperation and obedience. Jesus here stresses the difficulties of the spiritual life, where few will enter God's glory while the door (consider it shaped like a cross) remains open.¹¹ No one is excluded from this banquet except those who exclude themselves.⁴ In a similar passage in Matthew 7:13 Jesus says to "Enter by the narrow gate for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life and those who find it are few."

25 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.' Portraying himself as the owner of the house, Jesus makes it clear that mere acquaintance with him and his teaching is useless. Only those who embrace and live his way will enter.³ Many will seek too late, after the Kingdom has come; each one can and must strive now.¹

26 And you will say, 'We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets.' No one has a right to the kingdom by birth or by any other external criterion.¹

27 Then he will say to you, 'I do not know where you are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!' Although heirs to the kingdom, the impenitent of Israel will be shut out from God's blessings.¹¹

28 And there will be wailing and grinding of teeth This refers to the suffering of the damned who are excluded from the heavenly banquet.¹¹ when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves cast out.

29 And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south Since the eighth century B.C., the northern tribes of Israel had been scattered among the Gentiles and since the sixth century B.C., many from the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin had likewise lived in exile throughout the ancient world. The prophets announced a future reunion of Jacob's descendants under the Davidic Messiah. Jesus is this anointed Davidic ruler who will re-gather the tribes of Israel, together with all nations into his glorious kingdom.⁶ and will recline at table in the kingdom of God. The celebration banquet will include Israelites and Gentiles in the one family of God.¹¹ The Eucharist now is a preparation for the eternal banquet of the elect in the Father's kingdom. It is an anticipation of the heavenly glory.¹⁰ (CCC 1402)

30 For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last." When Christ came and announced his spiritual kingdom and the rigid conditions for entering it, most of the Jews refused to accept him as the promised Messiah; they rejected him. On the other hand, when the Gospel and the teachings of Christ were preached to the pagan world, great numbers of the Gentiles gladly accepted them and became devout Christians. They who had been "last" (the Gentiles in

great numbers) became “first” and those who were “first” (the Jews as a class) became “last” (they were rejected).¹³ This saying functions as a warning against thinking oneself first. Those not expected to be part of the remnant are included, those who thought themselves holy are not.¹²

Some of the material for this commentary is taken from: (1) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (2) “The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66” by Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., (3) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1998” by Lawrence E. Mick, (4) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2004” by Aelred Rosser, (5) “The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken & Marie Finn, (6) “Understanding The Scriptures” by Scott Hahn, Ph.D., (7) “The Navarre Bible: Major Prophets,” (8) “Saint Joseph Commentary On The Sunday Readings” by Achille Degeest, O.F.M., (9) “The Navarre Bible: Hebrews,” (10) “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (11) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke,” (12) “The Gospel of Luke” by Luke Timothy Johnson, (13) “The Parables Of Christ” by Charles J. Callan, O.P., and (14) “The Navarre Bible: ST LUKE”.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.