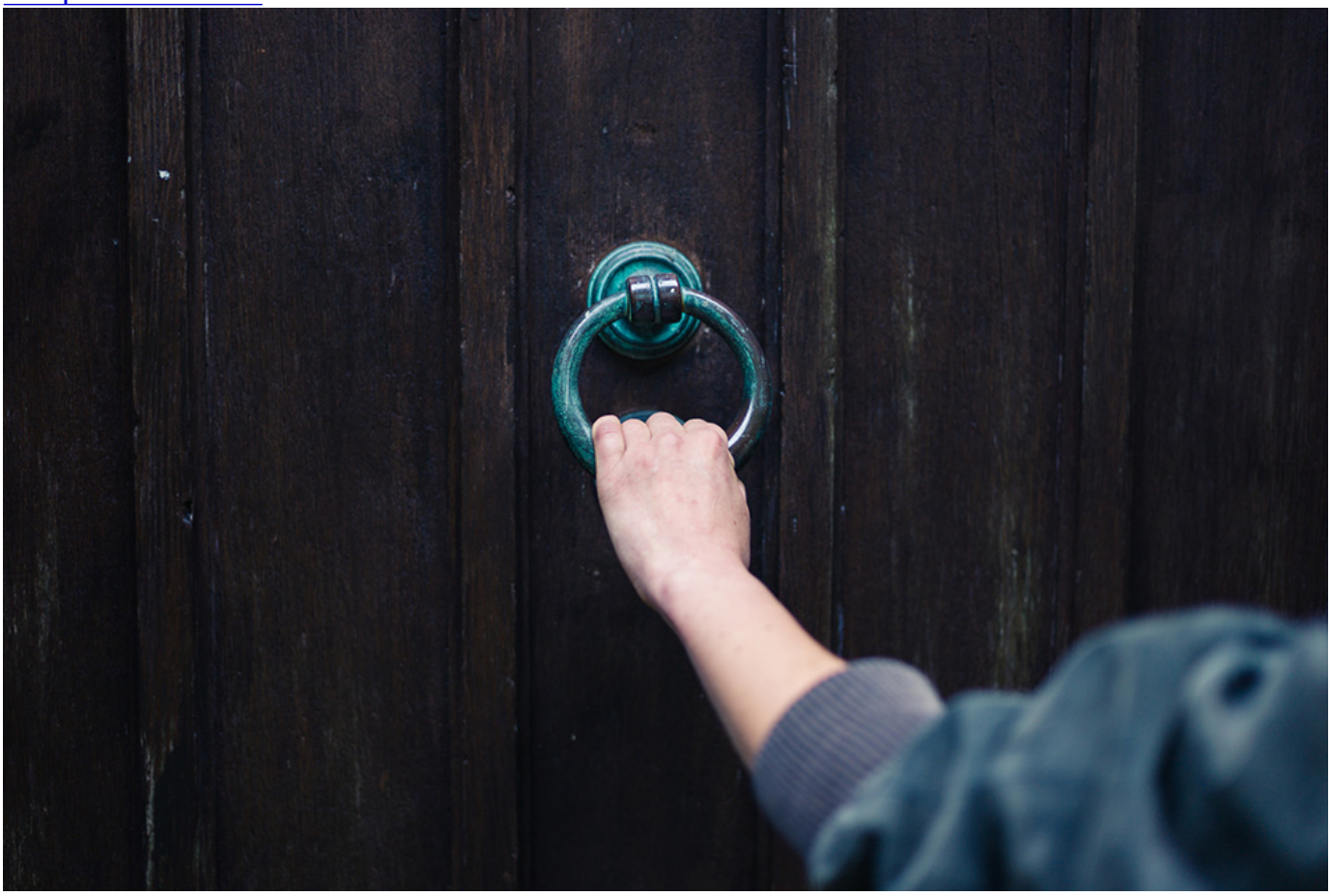
Spirituality
Scripture for Life



(Dreamstime/Loganban)



by Sr. Mary M. McGlone

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August 20, 2022

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When someone asks Jesus a question, it's a setup as clear as the line: "A man walked into a bar ..." We should get ready for a story that turns expectations inside out. Today's scene spotlights a fellow whose inquiry subtly suggests that few people (other than himself) will be saved. Jesus circumvents the discussion of numbers by switching the focus to the difficulty of gaining entrance to the master's mansion.

Jesus' story warns that the passageway into the dwelling of the saved is narrow and that the entrance could well be locked when expectant applicants arrive. When they protest, "But we ate and drank with you!", Jesus has the master reply, "I do not know where you are from."

Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 21, 2022

Isaiah 66:18-21

Psalm 117

Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13

Luke 13:22-30

Note well: This retort comes from the host at the ever-open table. It also comes not long after Jesus encouraged people to keep knocking on a locked door, trusting that the insider would eventually break down and open to them. What's up?

This incident becomes more comprehensible when we recall that Luke wrote the Gospel not as a documentary, but to help a practicing Christian community deepen their living of their faith. In that context, we realize that the story focuses on teaching, eating and drinking, the key elements of the celebration of the Eucharist.

The theme of the Eucharist subtly permeates Luke's whole Gospel. From the hungry being fed in Mary's Magnificat through the Beatitudes and the teaching surrounding the Lord's Prayer, Luke emphasizes God's role in feeding the hungry.

The banquets Jesus describes in the Gospel are images of the reign of God, and when the risen Lord appears to the disciples, he eats with them and they recognize him in the breaking of the bread. All of this suggests that this story offers a reflection on Eucharist.

Now, let's ask what's happening when the rejected people claim, "We ate and drank with you and you taught us," and the master replies, "I do not know where you are from." Does this not sound like a warning that it will never be enough to say, "We sat through the homilies, blessed ourselves and received Communion every single Sunday"?

In today's reading from Isaiah, God says, "I know" your works and thoughts. God didn't say, "I saw your church attendance card."

God then goes on, like Jesus in the Gospel, promising that people of all nations will participate in the joy of divine glory. In this final chapter of Isaiah, God calls all the nations, not just a chosen people, adding that not even the once-hereditary priesthood can be restricted to a certain class.

All of this leads us to recognize that "eating and drinking" with Christ is genuine only when our table is as open as Jesus made his.

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The Gospel began with a question about numbers, a question implying exclusion. Jesus replied by talking about how to get into the master's mansion. He moved from a question of competing for limited spaces to understanding how to be ready to enter the place to which we are invited.

Jesus explains that the saved will be the people known by the master. Salvation becomes the equivalent of being known by Christ. It is the experience of the people who have walked his way.

Being known by Christ requires more than the gestures and rituals of worship. It implies listening so deeply that Christ's word lives in us.

Jesus intimates that he really knows only those who have allowed him into their lives so completely that they reflect and actually represent him in their own context. This

is Luke's version of "I know mine and mine know me."

Understood from this perspective, we see how Jesus' reply to the question "Will many be saved?" flips the focus back on the questioner. In essence, Jesus is asking, "Are you seeking my way of life or prestigious status?"

Those who seek rank will find it, and find it shallow. Those who follow Jesus down his road and through his gate will find that they are the least made first, the lowly who will shine with God's own glory.

One of the core Gospel conundrums is that one cannot save oneself. Whenever we strive to be perfect or focus on sin and forgiveness, we remain the center of our attention. The passage through Jesus' narrow gate takes us beyond self-concern into the realm of knowing we are loved and are therefore free to love any and everyone else.

When we understand this, we will understand what it means to proclaim, "Lord, by your cross and resurrection you have set us free. *You* are the savior of the world."

It's not how many will be saved, but how many will let it happen to them?

A version of this story appeared in the **Aug 5-18, 2022** print issue under the headline: Being known by Christ.