Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

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August 20, 2022
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“Lord, will only a few people be saved?” (Luke 13:23).

Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isa 66:18-21; Ps 117; Heb 12:5-7, 11-13; Luke 13:22-30

The path to salvation passes through a narrow gate. Jesus’ own mission took him through a baptism of fire. Every disciple must lose his life to gain it. The treasure we seek will cost us everything. Only those who pick up their crosses can follow Jesus.

With these and other metaphors and parables, Jesus tries to prepare us for our own paschal passage, when we must surrender ourselves to the paradox of his own death and resurrection.

In today’s Gospel, people who had thought they had fulfilled every ritual requirement and earned every credential as faithful Christians are shocked to find themselves excluded. What was missing? The Master of the House does not recognize them because in all their busy focus on formal church membership they have never nurtured a personal relationship with God.

Other parables like the story of the wise bridesmaids who had extra oil or the wise man who built house on rock teach the same message. The essence of salvation is to enter into a personal relationship with God and to build your life on a foundation of carrying out the Word of God. Those who do this, even if they are outside the formal circles of faith and church affiliation, will be recognized as true children of God. Outsiders will become insiders, the last will be first.

In his emphasis on encounter and surprise, Pope Francis has tried to free Catholics from any complacency or sense of entitlement simply because they are members of the church. God comes when we least expect it, and in ways we cannot anticipate or control. Every day is filled with new challenges and opportunities, and only if we are free enough to go with the flow and respond to each grace do we discover God in the moment.

How different this encounter with the living God is from rule keeping and merit counting. Discipleship is a way of life, a love story and an adventure. We will know we are alive and living it when we feel the joy of the Gospel.

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