

Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time- Year C
August 25, 2019
Reflection by Sister Pat Coughlin, OSB, D.Min.
IS 66:18-21; HEB 12:5-7, 11-13; LK 13:22-30

In our gospel this morning Jesus is traveling along the road to Jerusalem. The air in Galilee and Judea is full of tension, turbulence, expectation and excitement. A great reversal was about to happen. Many thought that God was about to appear and free the Jews from Roman oppression and inaugurate a new era. The roads were full of itinerant preachers announcing God's immanent arrival. Every true son or daughter of Abraham would belong to the new Kingdom of God.

Then someone approaches Jesus and seemingly tries to get reassurance that, if everybody wouldn't get in, they would. Imagine that person's surprise at Jesus answer. Jesus gives no reassurance. His answer is that many of those who thought they were guaranteed a key to the kingdom would find themselves locked out with no reservation for the banquet. On top of that their places would be taken by foreigners.

These people took their status as members of the Chosen People for granted. They had forgotten about the challenges and obligations that go with being chosen. And Jesus has turned the criteria for admission upside down. It's not ethnicity that makes us part of the Kingdom of God, but ethics. That's where the narrow gate comes in. Jesus tells them that they must strive to enter the Kingdom. The Greek verb for strive used by Luke implies an intense, purposeful struggle. For that you need discipline.

The author of Hebrews quotes the book of Proverbs in urging discipline to an early Christian community. Somewhere along the way most of us learned that the root of the word discipline is to learn; a disciple is someone who is open to learning. Parents and teachers teach children by means of discipline. Unfortunately, some of them use discipline as an excuse to offload their own rage by beating or shaming their children. True discipline

is not fun or easy, but its aim is to teach habits that are constructive and enabling.

Discipline is not just for children. Book stores, libraries and movies are full of stories of people who have gone through difficult, even horrifying times and which, in the end, inspired them to take action and care for others.

So, it takes discipline to enter the Kingdom of God, but "Jesus never said exactly what it is. [Jesus] described it in terms of images and parables that spoke to the whole person and exposed the narrow and limiting aspects of his listeners' mode of consciousness, all the while inviting them into something new. It is not a birthright or the right ethnicity or political connections. It is a gift." * It's living inside the really big picture in the here and now." ** "The invitation to enter the Kingdom of God is freely given, but its acceptance must be freely received and consciously chosen. It is not intended to be a whim based on good feelings, but calculated with a knowledge of the risk and an acceptance of the cost."

We are the kingdom. It's in us and among us and all around us. In the 21st century the discoveries of science have taught us that everything in the universe is made of the same stuff as we are and that we humans are only a part of the Great Web of Life. All of creation is God's place, God's kingdom. God's power and energy are within us and among us. Pope Francis has pleaded with all nations and peoples to participate in the Reign/Kingdom of God, by taking responsibility for the care of our common home and for justice for the poor who are suffering the most from climate change.

The task is not an easy one. Changing mentalities and changing lifestyles demand sacrifice and discipline. But if we think of these as the work of the Kingdom, we might be motivated to work toward a more just world where those who are now least and last are given their due.

Isaiah and Jesus have given us beautiful visions of the Kingdom. Each of us, in whatever

way we can, can make a contribution to making them closer for all creatures of the earth.

* Beatrice Bruteau. *The Holy Thursday Revolution*, Orbis, 2005

**Richard Rohr. cac.org, Nov. 9, 2016

***Judy Cannato. *Field of Compassion*, Sorin Books, 2010

Pat Coughlin, OSB, D.Min.