

*August 21, 2016*  
*21st Sunday in Ordinary Time*  
*Luke 13:22-30*

22 Jesus passed through towns and villages, teaching as he went and making his way to Jerusalem. 23 Someone asked him, “Lord, will only a few people be saved?”

He answered them, 24 “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough.”

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.’ 26 And you will say, ‘We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets,’ 27 Then he will say to you, ‘I do not know where you are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers! 28 “And there will be wailing and grinding of teeth 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 west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God. 30 For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”

### Background

In this text, Jesus is making his way toward Jerusalem and his own death. An unnamed person asks Jesus how many will be part of the final reign of God. In a familiar fashion, Jesus redirects the question, from how many will be saved to the more significant question of who will be saved. Underlying Jesus’ response is the commonly held belief of the day that, as people of Israel, they were part of God’s chosen people, and would be part of God’s final realm. The Pharisees, however, held that only a remnant few would be included in the final reign of God. This difference may very well have been what led to Jesus being asked for his understanding.

Much of the life and culture of Jesus’ day was concerned with knowing who belonged within an individual’s circle of relationship, and therefore owed allegiance. Those outside that group were viewed as potential threats to the well-being of one’s primary group. One’s family was part of this group by the fact that one shared blood. The sharing of other bodily fluids (blood, saliva, semen or milk) also created a bond between people. Examples would include one’s marriage partner and a person who was nursed by the same wet-nurse.

Another way of establishing a bond between people was through eating together. Throughout both the Christian and Hebrew scriptures, the significance of who is present at the table or at banquet is often noted and used for instruction. Most can think of many examples that probably include: The Passover, Abraham’s meal with the two strangers, Jesus dining with Zacchaeus, with Martha and Mary, and with the Pharisees, The Last Supper, Jesus’ meals with the disciples after the resurrection, and Peter’s eating with the gentile converts who were not circumcised, and then refusing to eat with them after he received criticism for eating with those who had not been circumcised. Underlying all of these is the understanding that a bond is created among those who share a meal together.

The parable Jesus tells in this gospel challenges those who think they know who will be included in the final realm of God. Among those who believe that they are already invited are those who have shared meals with Jesus. But twice in the parable the master says to those outside the house, “I do not know where you come from.” (Luke 13:25 and 27) The parable also indicates that among those who are presumed not to be part of the household, there are some who will be welcomed.



The parable concludes, "And people will come from the east and the west, and the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God." (Luke 13:29) This is a familiar way of saying that people from all nations and ways of life will be part of the final age. It is important to note that some, among those who believe they are part of the household, will find themselves outside the doors, and some, who some might presume will not be included, will find welcome. The emphasis would seem to be on how one is striving to enter through the narrow gate, and not on membership in a particular group.

### Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever been treated as an outsider?
2. Have you ever been treated like an insider, but felt uneasy?
3. Have you ever received the hospitality of another who welcomed you as if you are part of the family?
4. Have you ever welcomed someone who needed a place to celebrate Thanksgiving or Christmas to join you and your family? How did that experience change your celebration?
5. Within your circle of family and friends, are there those who believe that they are much closer to you than they really are? What do you think of Jesus' ability to tell a story that invites people to reflect on the reality of their relationship with him and the Father?
6. What kind of person would be asking Jesus how many will be saved?
7. What kind of person would be interested in hearing that among those included will be many who come from the "east and the west and the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God?"
8. How do you hear this gospel? What is it that God seems to be saying to you and your concerns? How would you like to respond to God?

The reflection and questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel.

