

Opening the Word: An urgent Gospel



Summer is a time for respite, for a leisurely peace where we get a chance to breathe. We go to pools, head out on vacation and enjoy the last quiet moments with our families before business resumes as normal.

There is a temptation to let this leisurely calm infiltrate the Church. It's summer, after all. Is it necessary to go to Mass every week? It's sunny outside. Do we have to continue praying as much as we do during the year? Can't we all take a break from the work of evangelization, from the gospelization of all existence?

Our Lord Jesus Christ has an answer to this question. As we enjoy our last days of the summer holiday, we hear the voice of Jesus Christ underline for us the precarious nature of salvation.

Some unknown person asks Jesus whether only a few people will be saved. Of course, we expect an answer to this question that comforts us. We expect the Lord of mercy, the God of love unto the end, to console the interlocutor. Of course, there is ample space in the kingdom of heaven for all! Don't worry that much. Just be decent.

[21st Sunday in Ordinary Time – Aug. 25, 2019](#)

IS 66:18-21
PS 117:1, 2
HEB 12:5-7, 11-13
LK 13:22-30

Jesus does not give the answer we seek. Not only is the gate to salvation narrow, but Jesus goes apocalyptic on the Church enjoying its summer holiday.

At the end of time, the master will be standing at a locked door. We'll plead to enter, saying we didn't know that the gate would be locked. We were visiting family on the Cape. We were at the Jersey Shore. We were enjoying a weekend in Napa Valley.

But the master won't respond with a, "No big deal, come on in." Instead, he won't recognize us. We'll plead anew: "Come on, we were here all along. We set up chairs at the parish picnic. We ran retreats in the parish. We were the first in line at the Lenten fish fry."

Our Lord responds with a terrifying response: "'I do not know where [you] are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!'" (Lk 13:27).

The supposed do-gooders, those who lived a "decent life," will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven. God does not want decency from us. God doesn't want a respectful, bourgeois religious life. God wants everything.

Jacques Maritain cautioned against this liberal bourgeois sense of Christianity that creeps into the Church. It's the kind of Catholicism that is happy to host a parish festival or two.

That's not the Good News that Jesus Christ has come to announce. If we want to enter the narrow gate, we're obliged to announce to the entire world that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Jesus Christ is not the Lord who occasionally enters our homes and our vacation plans. He is the Lord who is everything to us.

He is the Lord who demands we proclaim to the ends of the world, even when it's uncomfortable, that the meaning of life is not found in the exercise of power, prestige and importance. It is love.

Divine love unto the end.

So, welcome back from summer vacation, dear Church. Don't wait for the announcement that parish religious education is about to start up again. Don't wait for the beginning of school or for a new crop of RCIA candidates.

The time is now to travel the highways and byways to proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord. Not the hypothetical, abstract Lord we entertain between the months of September and April.

He is the Lord of all time, all space, even the Lord of summer.

He is the Lord of now.

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