

# *Gratitude Foundation*

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*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?  
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

## **Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time—C**

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*“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”*

(1 Thess: 5:18)

# Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time—C

## Reading 1

### Isaiah 66:18-21

Thus says the LORD:

I know their works and their thoughts,  
and I come to gather nations of every language;  
they shall come and see my glory.

I will set a sign among them;

from them I will send fugitives to the nations:

to Tarshish, Put and Lud, Mosoch, Tubal and Javan,  
to the distant coastlands

that have never heard of my fame, or seen my glory;

and they shall proclaim my glory among the nations.

They shall bring all your brothers and sisters from all the nations  
as an offering to the LORD,

on horses and in chariots, in carts, upon mules and dromedaries,  
to Jerusalem, my holy mountain, says the LORD,

just as the Israelites bring their offering

to the house of the LORD in clean vessels.

Some of these I will take as priests and Levites, says the LORD.

## Responsorial Psalm

### Psalm 117:1, 2

R.(Mk 16:15) **Go out to all the world and tell the Good News.**

or:

**R. Alleluia.**

Praise the LORD, all you nations;

glorify him, all you peoples!

**R. Go out to all the world and tell the Good News.**

or:

**R. Alleluia.**

For steadfast is his kindness toward us,

and the fidelity of the LORD endures forever.

**R. Go out to all the world and tell the Good News.**

or:

**R. Alleluia.**

## **Reading 2**

### **Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13**

Brothers and sisters,  
You have forgotten the exhortation addressed to you as children:  
"My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord  
or lose heart when reproved by him;  
for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines;  
he scourges every son he acknowledges."  
Endure your trials as "discipline";  
God treats you as sons.  
For what "son" is there whom his father does not discipline?  
At the time,  
all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain,  
yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness  
to those who are trained by it.

So strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees.  
Make straight paths for your feet,  
that what is lame may not be disjoined but healed.

## **Alleluia**

### **John 14:6**

**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**  
I am the way, the truth and the life, says the Lord;  
no one comes to the Father, except through me.  
**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**

# Gospel

## Luke 13:22-30

Jesus passed through towns and villages,  
teaching as he went and making his way to Jerusalem.  
Someone asked him,  
"Lord, will only a few people be saved?"  
He answered them,  
"Strive to enter through the narrow gate,  
for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter  
but will not be strong enough.  
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.  
And you will say,  
'We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets.'  
Then he will say to you,  
'I do not know where you are from.  
Depart from me, all you evildoers!'  
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.  
And people will come from the east and the west  
and from the north and the south  
and will recline at table in the kingdom of God.  
For behold, some are last who will be first,  
and some are first who will be last."

## Exegesis

### Isaiah 66:18-21

Our pericope is taken from the final chapter of *The Book of Isaiah*. Scholars commonly refer to the final section of Isaiah, chapters 56 through 66, as *Trito-Isaiah* or *Third Isaiah*. The setting of this final section of Isaiah puts a remnant of the Israelites back in Jerusalem immediately following the Exile. Isaiah begins with events prior to the Exile. *Second-Isaiah*, chapters 40 through 55, deal with events during the time of the Exile.

Throughout their years of bondage in Babylon, *Deutero-Isaiah*, repeatedly called on the people to rejoice with a lively hope that God would rescue them as He once did in Egypt.

*Third-Isaiah* compares the events of the delivery of the people from captivity in Babylon to the Exodus experience. Like the Exodus, freedom from Babylon marked the start of the journey to the Promised Land. The first events involve the long sojourn through the desert to settle the land. The second “Exodus” also begins with a journey, this time to reclaim and rebuild the temple, their rituals, the city and their lives in the Promised Land. As they return to Jerusalem, they find their city burned and the temple destroyed. It must have been demoralizing to contemplate the daunting task of rebuilding.

With their new freedom, *Trito-Isaiah* continually calls on the people to rejoice. “All who keep the sabbath free from profanation and hold to My covenant, them I will bring to My holy mountain and make joyful in My house of prayer.” (Is 56: 6-7). “They shall have a double inheritance in their land; everlasting joy shall be theirs.” (Is 61: 7). “I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul.” (Is 61: 10). “Lo, I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; ... For I create Jerusalem to be a joy and its people to be a delight.” (Is 65: 17-18).

*Trito-Isaiah* is calling on all people to rejoice because God is drawing them to Himself. *Trito-Isaiah* begins at Chapter 56. The New American Bible titles this section, *Return of the First Captives – The Lord’s House Open to All*. The Israelites saw themselves as the chosen people, as God called them to be peculiarly His own. They were called to be a light to the nations that God may draw all people to Himself. This truth is being revealed in *Trito-Isaiah*.

The universal call to the Lord is revealed at the beginning of Chapter 56. “Let not the foreigner say, when he would join himself to the Lord, ‘The Lord will surely exclude me from His people.’” (Is 56: 3). “Loving the name of the Lord and becoming His servants. All who keep the sabbath free from profanation and hold to My covenant, them I will bring to My holy mountain and make joyful in My house of prayer. For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the dispersed of Israel: Others I will gather to Him besides those already gathered.” (Is 56: 6-8).

Our pericope continues the theme of the universal call of the Lord, who desires to draw all people to Himself. Our selected passage is titled *Gathering of the Nations* in the NAB. Not only are all of the Jews of the Diaspora called home to Jerusalem, but people of all nations and of every language. Tarshish is in southern Spain, Put and Lud are in Africa, Mosoch is uncertain (text unclear), Tubal is near the Black Sea, and Javan is in the Ionian Islands. The nations mentioned represent a triumphal procession of both Jews and Gentiles from all directions coming to the Lord, on His holy mountain, Jerusalem.

Our passage ends with a most radical pronouncement. Gentiles are being called to the ritual priesthood. Just when Ezekiel, Haggai, and Zechariah were restricting priesthood to the Zadokites and dispossessing other Levites of important cultic functions (Ezek 40:46; 44:10-16) Tr-Isa extends priesthood.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Brown, Fitzmyer, Murphy; The New Jerome Biblical Commentary; P.H.; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.; page 348.



## Exegesis (Continued)

### Psalm 117:1, 2

Psalm 117 consists of two verses and is the shortest psalm in the psalter. It is titled *The Nations Called to Praise*. The theme supports the universal call of God to all people as revealed in our first reading from *Trito-Isaiah*.

*Praise the LORD, all you nations; glorify Him, all you peoples!* St. Paul cites this verse in *Romans*: “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise Him.” (Rom 15: 11). The Hebrew word that is translated here as *praise* is *hallel*. *Hallel* means to admire, eulogize, praise, boast, exult, or to exclaim Halleluiah. It connotes an outward and verbal expression of praise and glory. The Hebrew word for *Lord* in this verse is *Yahweh*. The Hebrew word translated as *nations* is *goy*. *Goy* can mean *nation* or *people*. It is sometimes used to refer to Gentiles, pagans or heathens. The Hebrew word for *glorify* is *sheba*. *Sheba* means to *extol*, *laud* or *sing praises*. Again, it connotes an outward, verbal expression. The Hebrew word translated as *peoples* in this verse is *ummah*. *Ummah* describes a particular people, as a particular tribe, or small group of people with civil or familial ties. The psalmist is calling all such groups of people to praise the Lord.

*For steadfast is his kindness toward us, and the fidelity of the LORD endures forever.* The Hebrew word for *LORD* here is again *Yahweh*. The Hebrew word that is translated here as *steadfast kindness* is *hesed*. Often this word is translated as *steadfast love*. *Hesed* describes the attributes of our God, who is love. It describes His love, mercy, kindness, loyalty, favor, and faithfulness. *Hesed* describes a permanence and an immutability that is of God. *Hesed* is translated into Greek as *Agape*. The Hebrew word translated in this verse as *fidelity* is *emet*. *Emet* connotes constancy, trustworthiness, firmness, dependability, assurance, and immutable truth. *Emet* is translated into Greek as *alethia*.

Psalm 100 echoes the theme of Psalm 117. “Shout joyfully to the Lord, all you lands; worship the Lord with cries of gladness; come before him with joyful song. Give thanks to the Lord, bless His name; good indeed is the Lord, whose love endures forever, whose faithfulness lasts through every age.” (Ps 100: 1, 5).

*Praise the Lord!* Verse two ends as verse one began. The Hebrew word here is *Halleluiah*. This is an outward verbal expression of praise and glory to Yahweh.

*Go out to all the world and tell the Good News.* This “psalm” response is selected from the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 16, verse 15. This verse is the beginning of the parting words of the Risen Lord at the moment of His ascension into Heaven. As is typical of the words of the Risen Lord, they are words of action. Jesus is commanding us to bring the Gospel, the Good News to all of the world. Through Jesus, from the Hill of Calvary, through His Mystical Body here on earth, God seeks to draw all of the world to Himself, from east and west and from north and south.

## Exegesis (Continued)

### Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13

The author of Hebrews is calling us to “persevere in running the race that lies before us.” We are being called to emulate the cloud of witnesses that have gone before us, but most especially to “keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith.” “For the sake of the joy that lay before Him He endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider how He endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart.” (Heb 12: 2-3). To unite our lives with Jesus means that we too must pick up our cross and follow Him.

*Brothers and sisters, You have forgotten the exhortation addressed to you as children: "My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when reproved by him; for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines; he scourges every son he acknowledges." In this verse Hebrews is quoting Proverbs: "The discipline of the Lord, my son, disdain not; spurn not His reproof; for whom the Lord loves, He reproves, and He chastises the son He favors." (Prov 3: 11-12). In the original verse from Proverbs the word translated as discipline is *musar*. *Musar* connotes instruction, training, correction, and reproof as in training a child. A more literal translation of Proverbs vs. twelve is as follows: "For the Lord reproves him whom He loves, as a father (*Ab*) the son in whom He delights." The Hebrew word for *father* is *ab* or *abba*, the affectionate word for father or grandfather. The Greek word for *discipline* in our pericope today is *paideia*. Similar to the Hebrew word *musar*, *paideia* describes the training or instruction that takes place in the rearing of a child.*

The *Book of Judith* provides a similar teaching on the discipline of the Lord. “Besides all this, we should be grateful to the Lord our God, for putting us to the test, as He did our forefathers. Recall how He dealt with Abraham, and how He tried Isaac, and all that happened to Jacob in Syrian Mesopotamia while he was tending the flocks of Laban, his mother’s brother.” (Judith 8:25-27). The *Book of Job* also encourages us to accept the Lord’s discipline. “Happy is the man whom God reproves! The Almighty’s chastening do not reject. For He wounds, but He binds up; He smites, but His hands give healing.” (Job 5: 17-18).

In the tenth chapter of Hebrews, we are also called to reflect on suffering and affliction. “Remember the days past when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a great contest of suffering. At times you were publicly exposed to abuse and affliction; at other times you associated yourselves with those who were so treated. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence; it will have great recompense. You need endurance to do the will of God and receive what He has promised.” (Heb 10: 32-36).

Hebrews also calls us to keep our eyes on Jesus who suffered for us. “Son though He was, He learned obedience from what He suffered; and when He was made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him.” (Heb 5: 8).

*At the time, all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain, yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it.* The Greek word translated as *peaceful* in this verse is *eirenikos*, which is the word that is often quoted as from the mouth of Jesus referring to the peace that He came to bring to earth. It is the word that is commonly used to translate the Hebrew word *shalom* into Greek. The Greek word for *righteousness* is *dikaiosyne* which means to be justified or to be in right relationship with the Lord.

*So, strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees. Make straight paths for your feet, that what is lame may not be disjointed but healed.* Hebrews reflects back on the imagery of the race, i.e., “persevere in running the race that lies before us.” (Heb 12: 1). The image is of a runner in a race that is tired with drooping hands and weak knees. Speaking of the deliverance of Israel during the Exile, the Prophet Isaiah exhorts the people, “They will see the glory of God. Strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak. Say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not!” (Is 35: 2-4).

Hebrews is again quoting a citation from Proverbs in the second half of this verse. “Let your eyes look straight forward. Survey the path for your feet and let all your ways be sure. Turn neither to the right or left, keep your foot far from evil.” (Prov 4: 25-27). Job reminds us that the end result of the Lord’s discipline is healing. The Almighty’s chastening do not reject. For He wounds, but He binds up; He smites, but His hands give healing.” (Job 5: 18).

## Exegesis (Continued)

### Luke 13:22-30

The setting of our Gospel pericope today, as in the past few weeks, is Jesus on His journey to Jerusalem to embrace His Passion, and He is teaching on the way. Someone from the crowd posed the question: “Lord, will only a few people be saved?” The remainder of our Gospel passage capture the words of Jesus, His response.

*“Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough.”* The Greek word that is translated as *strive* in this passage is *agonizomai* which means to struggle, fight, strive, to make every effort. It is the same word that was in Hebrews in the second reading last weekend. “In your struggle (*agonizomai*) against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood.” (Heb 12: 4). In his letter to the Phillipians St. Paul urged the members of his congregation to work out their salvation. “So then, my beloved, obedient as you have always been, not only when I am present but all the more now when I am absent, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. For God is the one who, for His good purpose, works in you both to desire and to work.” (Phil 2: 12-13). In his letter to the Ephesians St. Paul encourages the brothers and sisters to turn toward God’s grace. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast. For we are His handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them.” (Ep 2: 8-10). Just as faith is both gift and response, so also is salvation a gift and an acceptance of that gift. To accept the gift of salvation we must enter into a personal relationship with the Savior. Salvation is a “two way street.”

*‘Lord, open the door for us.’ He will say to you in reply, ‘I do not know where you are from.’* It is interesting that the text does not say, “I do not know you,” but says, “I do not know where you are from.” Being in a personal relationship with the Lord, coming to know Him on a personal basis is necessary for salvation, scripture makes that clear. Sharing in a personal indwelling love, such that two can become one, is necessary. Scripture also gives us a lot of imagery of following Jesus on the way. Jesus, Himself declares, “I AM the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. Not knowing where someone is from would suggest a lack of awareness of the way that they traveled to arrive at the door. There is only one Way to Jesus and that is to walk in His footsteps, to follow Him. We all came from God and are returning to God. Not knowing where someone is from would mean that they strayed from God, from the source of life, the source of their beginning, their *arche*.

*And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God.* The imagery of God drawing all people to Himself from the four corners of the earth is prevalent in scripture. “He shall raise a signal to the nations and gather the outcasts of Israel; the dispersed of Judah He shall assemble from the four corners of the earth.” (Is 11: 12). “Because you are precious in My eyes and glorious, and because I love you... Fear not I am with you; from the east I will bring back your descendants, from the west I will gather you. I will say to the north; Give them up! Bring back My sons from afar, and My daughters from the ends of the earth... Let all the nations gather together, let the peoples assemble!” (Is 43: 4-9). “Those gathered from the foreign lands, from the east and west, from the north and south. Some lost their way in a barren desert; found no path toward a city to live in. In their distress they cried to the Lord, who rescued them in their peril, guided them by a direct path so they reached the city to live in.” (Ps 107: 4-6). The universal invitation to salvation is clear. “This is good and pleasing to God our savior, who wills that all people be saved and come to the knowledge of truth.” (1 Tm 2: 3)



## Reflection

As I was praying with the scripture for this coming weekend, two additional passages kept coming into my mind. The first is the following passage from Deuteronomy: "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the Lord, your God, heeding His voice, and holding fast to Him. For that will mean life for you, a long life for you in this land which the Lord swore He would give your fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." (Deut 30: 19-20). The Exodus story is a paradigm for salvation. It is about the powerful hand of God setting the people free, free to begin a long and arduous journey to the Promised Land. The gift lies before the people, but they still had to make the journey. Those that made the choice to follow the Lord, to follow the pillar of light that led them, were fed with mana from heaven along the way, were given life-giving water to drink from the Rock that was Christ. Those who chose to make that journey, to stay with Moses and the community reached the Promised Land.

The second scripture passage that came to mind in prayer is the famous judgement scene in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew's Gospel, sometimes titled *The Judgement of the Nations* or *The Separation of the Sheep and the Goats*. The salient point of this parable is that love of God and love of neighbor, or love of God through love of neighbor is essential for salvation. It is also important to note that in the parable that Jesus tells both sides, those that got it right and those that failed to love, ask the same question: "Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see You a stranger and welcome You, or naked and clothe You? When did we see You ill or in prison, and visit You?"

The "sheep" that gave aide to their neighbors in need did not do what they did as a conscious effort to gain eternal life. They did not necessarily see Jesus in the person in need. They simply saw a fellow human being in need. They responded out of love, not out of some attempt to earn eternal salvation. They did what they did out of compassion and love. They did it for the right reason, it was the right thing to do.

One morning as I was walking on a busy sidewalk in Manhattan, a rough looking man, dressed rather shabbily, with long hair and an unshaven face, walked up to me and got right in my face and asked rather loudly: "Are you saved brother!" I side stepped the man and continued walking to my client's office. When I got to the office there was an emergency message for me to call home. My best friend had been killed in an auto accident the prior evening. I would have been in the car with him if I had not been called to New York.

I prayed for the salvation of my friend's soul. I have to admit that I had not thought a lot about my personal salvation. To this day it is not something that I dwell on. I try to focus on my relationship with Jesus and His Church. I try to do the loving thing in all situations. I have spent many years as a priest praying for the souls of others and trying to draw them closer to Jesus. Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of Mine, you did for Me." And I will ask, "Lord, when did I see you hungry or thirsty...?"

Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

Yours in Christ,



## Personal Witness

In our Gospel parable this weekend Jesus says to people knocking at the door, “I do not know where you are from.” They said in return that they ate and drank with Him and were there as He taught in their streets. And sadly, Jesus says again, “I do not know where you are from.” The point is clear that knowing Jesus is essential for entry into the narrow gate of Heaven. So how do we come to know Jesus?

As I was going off to the seminary many years ago, a wise old priest friend of mine said, “Don’t let talking about God get in the way of talking to God.” At first, I was not sure what he meant by that. After about two months in the seminary, I knew exactly what he meant and it was some the best advice anyone ever gave to me. There is a big difference between knowing about someone and really knowing someone. There are a lot of famous or notorious people that we know a lot about, but we do not know them personally. We have never met them or spent time with them. In the seminary we obviously spend a lot of time talking about God. We read what all of the great theologians over the centuries have said about God. Over time this can seem rather abstract and distant. Each night I began to stop at the Blessed Sacrament chapel to spend a little time talking to God and more importantly listening to God with my heart.

Over a period of time my personal relationship with Jesus, which I thought was good, grew even stronger, more real and alive. With this personal relationship with Jesus my life was changed forever. I became more and more conscious of, more aware of, His indwelling presence within me. With that awareness, came an ever-growing clarity of faith. I found myself in the words of St. Paul, “putting on the heart and mind of Christ.” I feel myself everyday growing deeper in that personal relationship with Jesus, a relationship that has been alive since my earliest childhood memories. It is an inexhaustible, eternal, infinite relationship that knows no bounds. No narrow gates or locked doors, no jaws of death can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus!

My prayer for all of us is that we all continue to grow deeper in our personal relationship with Jesus. As Christ’s Church we come together each week to worship together, to hear the Word of God proclaimed, to receive Jesus, body, blood, soul and divinity in the Most Holy Eucharist. This experience must become very personal for each one of us. Jesus pours out His heart to us. Each of us must meet Him at the level of the heart. Only then will we truly come to know, to love and to serve Him. Our eternal life, our salvation, depends on that relationship! Remember the question, “Will only a few be saved?”

