

Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time “C” Cycle August 20-21, 2016

Warner Sallman was a very talented twentieth century artist, who painted many images of Jesus. One of his paintings was called *Christ at Heart’s Door*. It portrayed Jesus knocking on a household door. Sallman showed his work to a fellow artist, who gave him a favorable review. The only negative comment the reviewer gave was that Sallman had neglected to include a handle on the door.

Sallman explained that this omission was done on purpose. It was to show that the Lord seeks admission to many households and hearts but the only way of entry he chooses is from those inside. The Lord respects our free will and never forces his entrance into our lives, despite his burning desire to be welcomed.

Both the Old Testament reading from the prophet Isaiah and the Gospel from St. Luke tell us about entry into God’s Kingdom. Isaiah addresses the Jewish exiles in Babylon about 600 years before Christ. He gives a message that the Lord will use his beloved chosen people to draw the Gentile nations to him. The Lord wants to gather all people to himself, to enjoy a loving relationship with him.

The Gospel, from Saint Luke, gives somewhat of a mixed message. Jesus is asked if only a few people will be saved. He does not answer this question directly, but advises: “strive to enter through the narrow gate.” He goes on to say that many from all parts of the world, not only those of Jewish origin, will be welcomed to God’s Kingdom.

Jesus is correcting the notion that just because people have a casual acquaintance or even an admiration for him and his teaching does not automatically guarantee a lasting relationship or admittance into God’s presence. To claim that we are Catholics and observe our traditions is only a beginning. We need to give our hearts to the Lord. To gain entry to God, we need to enter through the narrow gate.

This means offering him right praise in regular worship and heartfelt prayer. It means observing the Lord's commandments. It means treating others fairly and with compassion and charity.

In short, being a serious disciple of the Lord means practicing Christian discipline, as the second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews advises. Although being a disciple of the Lord Jesus requires some sacrifice and self-control, it is not overwhelming or burdensome. Loving and serving the Lord deeply can make it a joy.

In viewing the Olympics we marvel at the great discipline that the athletes subject themselves to in training for their events in the hope of winning a gold, silver, or bronze medal, which will eventually be forgotten. We have a much better offer in being the Lord's disciple and far less strain.

Remember Warner Sallman's painting. Salvation, eternal life and happiness require welcoming the Lord into our lives. The Lord is knocking on our hearts and eager to be invited in!