

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (Year C)

August 25, 2019

Isaiah 66:18–21 • Hebrews 12:5–7, 11–13 • Luke 13:22–30

I.

Woodstock 50

—the music festival commemorating the golden anniversary of the original—
was supposed to have taken place two weeks ago.

But it was cancelled earlier this summer because of various problems.

I heard something interesting on the radio in connection with that.

Roger Daltry, lead singer of The Who,
had a terrible experience at the original Woodstock:

The Who's time slot for playing was 5:00 am.

And there was mud all over the place, following an epic rain storm.

Here's what Roger Daltry said about his experience:

“Woodstock wasn't peace and love.
There was an awful lot of shouting and screaming going on.
By the time it all ended, the worst sides of our nature had come out.
People were screaming at the promoters,
people were screaming to get paid.
We had to get paid, or we couldn't get back home.”

This is a good reminder that the full significance of an event emerges only later,
over the course of time.

It's not always clear, in the moment, what the meaning of something is.

That holds true for Woodstock,
which is now regarded as a key event in the history of American culture.

II.

Today's Gospel reading is about going deeper,
about seeing the same thing in a different, more meaningful way.

In the parable, the master of the house says twice:
"I do not know where you are from."

This second declaration is a response to a plea on the grounds of familiarity:

"We ate and drank in your company
and you taught in our streets."

This level of familiarity is not enough to get the master to open the door.

The context of the parable is significant:

"Jesus passed through towns and villages,
teaching as he went and making his way to Jerusalem."

The entire second half of Luke's Gospel, where today's reading is found,
is framed within Jesus' journey to Jerusalem.

That journey is not merely about geography.

Jerusalem is where Jesus will accomplish his Passion, Death, Resurrection.

That frame helps us to understand Christ's exhortation that introduces the parable:
"Strive to enter through the narrow gate."

Jesus is also referring to himself here,
to his own "passage" to the Father that he will accomplish on the Cross.

Those who follow Christ must be ready to make a similar "passage."

So, our striving is not a matter of our own efforts;
it's about responding to God's grace by imitating his Son.

As we hear in the Second Reading, from the Letter to the Hebrews,

“Strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees.
Make straight paths for your feet,
that what is lame may not be disjointed but healed.”

Healing is what God offers us.

That takes place within a deep and abiding relationship with the Son of God.

“I do not know where you are from.”

It’s not enough to know about God.

Christ wants us to truly know him.

He seeks a meaningful relationship with each of us.

For this reason, Jesus rejects superficiality and presumption in regard to God:

“Behold, some are last who will be first,
and some are first who will be last.”

God wants the real thing.

He wants the best of us and the best for us.

This week, the Church celebrated the feast of St. John Eudes (1601–1680),
a French priest of the 1600s with a deep devotion to the Sacred Heart.

Since that’s the title of this cathedral church,
let’s listen to St. John’s reflection on how the Sacred Heart
refers to a relationship with Christ:

“He belongs to you, but more than that, he longs to be in you,
living and ruling in you...his breath in your breath, his heart in your heart...
These great gifts in the follower of Christ originate from baptism.
They are increased and strengthened through confirmation
and by making good use of other graces that are given by God.
Through the holy eucharist they are brought to perfection.”

Christ shares his very life with us so that we can live like him.

Christ doesn't just make moral demands of us,
and then step back to see how we do on some kind of divine test.

No, Christ accompanies us; he strengthens us.

III.

So, I ask you to do one thing:

As you enter this cathedral, be sure to look up at the façade.

Note the inscription there:

“If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

That is a summons to go deeper in our spiritual lives,
to discover the power of Baptism and the other sacraments we receive.

To not just know about God, but to truly know him.

Our relationship with the Almighty is meant to develop over time,
so that our lives become a true communion—a deep fellowship with him.

That inscription is also a promise that Christ makes:
to be with us.

That is the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus at work in us.