

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
WEDNESDAY OF THE THIRTIETH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME
COLLEGIAL GATHERING OF BISHOPS
SACRED HEART SEMINARY
HALES CORNERS, WISCONSIN
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My Dear Friends in Christ,

I am happy to be with you again here at Sacred Heart. As the Apostolic Nuncio, the Holy Father's representative to the United States, I bring you the greetings of the Holy Father, assuring you of his prayers and paternal affection. I greet my brother bishops, who have gathered for a collegial sharing of ministerial experiences, as well as Father Raul Gomez, President and Rector, and Father Thomas Knoebel, for their kind invitation to be with you. I greet all the faculty and staff of the seminary community, and I thank you for your difficult but important work. Finally, I greet the seminarians. I want to encourage you to persevere in your vocations and to discern them carefully in the heart of the Church.

These days everyone is talking about the synod on synodality. We want to be a Church that walks together, that journeys together, a Church that listens. In our Gospel, Jesus continues His journey to Jerusalem and continues to teach those following Him about what it means to be a disciple. Let us journey with Him and listen to what He has to say.

An attentive listening to Luke's Gospel would reveal the theme of "reversal of fortune", beginning with the *Magnificat* when Mary says that God *has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly*. Luke's Gospel contains a theme of God's preferential option for the poor and the promise of salvation to the marginalized – to the poor, the leper, and the foreigner. We see this role reversal in the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus and in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Those who are seemingly on top in this world, time and again, end up on the bottom.

This is particularly true in this section of Luke's Gospel which focuses on parables and events involving meals. Jesus teaches about the banquet in the Kingdom of God. Two later stories involve a person seeking a higher place at the table, and he is forced to go to the lowest post, while the humble person who sits at the last place is invited to come up to a higher place. *Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and the humble will be exalted.*

Another involves people being invited to the banquet, but they make excuses and do not come. They all make excuses not to come to the banquet, so messengers are sent to the highways and byways to invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame. None of those who were first invited were able to partake of the king's banquet.

Today's Gospel is the prelude to the other stories and events. Jesus is making His way to Jerusalem, and He uses the journey to teach. Someone asks, "Lord, will only a few be saved?" It is a question posed even today by some who fashion themselves more Catholic than the Pope.

Jesus answers, not by giving numbers or percentages, but he contrasts the “few” with the many who are unsuccessful in their attempt to be saved. Jesus’ words serve as a warning that salvation is not guaranteed. Using the image of the narrow door, he exhorts us to “strive” for salvation rather than taking it for granted. Jesus, the Master Teacher, develops the image of the narrow door, describing it as being locked from the inside by the master of the house.

Try as one might, begging and pleading, “*Lord, open the door for us,*” is not sufficient. Some try to use their “identification card,” like a membership to a club, saying, “*We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets,*” as if they are “entitled” to entry. The Master rebuffs these notions, exclaiming: “I do not know where you are from.”

They know Jesus, but have not acknowledged Him. In fact, they have denied Him, and, at times, they have grown hostile toward Him and His teachings and demands. He says, “*Depart from me, you evildoers!*” What remains is the “*wailing and grinding of teeth.*” They had their opportunity, and they did not take it.

The message for us is clear. We are Catholics. Perhaps, we think that as members of the Church we get in automatically. Maybe a spirit of clericalism has seeped into so that we think, “I am a seminarian. I am a priest. I am a consecrated person. I am a bishop. I should get in, because I know Jesus.”

But do we love Jesus? Do we love Jesus enough to acknowledge Him? Are we prepared to suffer for Him? We can say with our lips that we love Him, but has our attitude toward Him or toward our neighbor changed? How stuck sometimes we are in our own ways of thinking, our own theological categories, unwilling to subject these to the conversion demanded by the Kingdom.

The parable concludes with “*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.*”

Those traveling with Jesus, the great crowds – those who had access to the Law and the Prophets but did not accept the Gospel of the Kingdom and who refused to acknowledge the Son – will not be admitted to the Banquet. On the other hand, those who perhaps were sinners, or who were thought to be poor and lowly, but who accepted Jesus as Lord and manifested it by leaving their sins and adhering to Him, they will be admitted. *For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last*”