

Fr. Martin's Reflection – August 24, 2025

Dear Friends in Christ,

Our first reading, Isaiah 66:18-21, and our gospel, Luke 13:22-30, present complementary visions of God's universal plan of salvation and the human responsibility to respond faithfully. Both passages affirm that God's kingdom is open to all nations, yet they also warn that entrance into this kingdom requires genuine conversion of heart, not mere affiliation or presumption.

In Isaiah 66:18-21, the prophet describes God's gathering of all nations and tongues to witness God's glory. The vision is striking in its inclusivity: people from distant lands—Tarshish, Put, Lud, Tubal, and Javan—will see the Lord's majesty and proclaim His name. More surprisingly, some of these outsiders will be chosen as priests and Levites, roles once reserved only for Israel. This reflects the expansive scope of God's salvific will: God's covenant is not meant for Israel alone but for all humanity. The passage emphasizes that God desires to unite people of every nation into a single community of worship, transcending ethnic, cultural, and ritual boundaries.

Luke 13:22-30 echoes this theme but adds an urgent moral challenge. When asked whether only a few will be saved, Jesus shifts the focus away from numbers and toward the personal responsibility of each disciple: "Strive to enter through the narrow gate." Salvation is not automatic, nor is it guaranteed by mere proximity to Jesus or membership in a chosen people. Many will claim familiarity with Christ — "We ate and drank in your company" — yet will be turned away because they did not truly live according to His word. Jesus warns that the last will be first and the first will be last, indicating that outsiders, such as Gentiles or those marginalized in society, may enter the kingdom before those who assume entitlement. The kingdom is open to all, but entry requires perseverance, humility, and authentic discipleship.

Together, these passages balance hope with accountability. Isaiah offers a hopeful vision of God's universal embrace: every nation is invited to share in His glory. Luke, however, cautions against complacency. Simply being part of a religious community or having external connections to faith is not enough. True discipleship requires striving—an active effort to live in righteousness, love, and fidelity to God's will. The "narrow gate" is not meant to exclude arbitrarily but to underscore the seriousness of the moral and spiritual life. Entering God's kingdom demands sincerity, sacrifice, and ongoing conversion.

For Christians today, these texts call for both openness and vigilance. Like Isaiah, we are reminded that God's plan transcends cultural and national boundaries. The Church must reflect this inclusivity, welcoming people of every background and recognizing the dignity of all as potential bearers of God's glory. At the same time, Luke challenges us to examine our own discipleship. Do we presume salvation without striving to live faithfully? Do our actions reflect a real commitment to Christ, or are we content with superficial association?

In the end, Isaiah and Luke together affirm that God's kingdom is both universal and demanding: it welcomes all, yet it requires each of us to walk the narrow path of faithfulness, humility, and love.

Going back to School

I want to first apologize to my younger brothers and sisters for mentioning the 'back to school' line, but it is getting very close for some, and it has already begun for others. I want to assure you of my, and our parishioners' prayers, for those who are beginning school for the first time, changing schools, or leaving home to attend school. This can be a very challenging time. Know God is with you and so are we. May you always know the closeness of God in your life and always have the depth of faith to reach out to God for the courage, support, and care you need.

God's love and blessings always,

Fr. Martin