

21st SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - C
“Glory to God in the highest!”

“Lord, will only a few people be saved?” It’s a question we all would like to ask Jesus. Actually, I would probably put it more positively. *“Lord, will we all be saved?”* Or maybe, *“Lord, who of us will be saved?”* Ah, that’s better! Now, if I didn’t think I had a good chance of being among “that number,” I wouldn’t ask the question. Although, there are some Christians who seem so sure of the answer they probably wouldn’t even bother to ask. After all, they know they are going to heaven, and they have a pretty good idea who isn’t. For some, we Catholics don’t have a chance. And I suppose there are some Catholics who still believe that some other Christians don’t have a chance.

Well, it’s a stupid question. It’s a waste of time to ask it, and, apparently, it is a waste of time for Jesus to answer it, because he doesn’t. It’s the wrong question. It assumes religion is primarily all about us and our getting into heaven. It’s not really about us and how good we are or even how holy we are. Our job isn’t about doing everything right so that God will love us enough to let us in. God loves us anyway, regardless of what we do. We don’t earn God’s love. We can’t. It’s gift, all gift. God invites everyone to the banquet. But then, Jesus surprisingly speaks of the narrow gate we must go through to get in. This does not mean only a few will make it in, but that the ones who make it in will be the ones who reflect what religion is really all about: making God believable to the world by living in the spirit of God at work in their lives.

In other words, religion is about God and our making God and God’s loving mercy real in our broken world. We don’t do right so we will get into heaven. Because we are made in the image of God, we do what is right so

we do not distort that image. We do right so unbelievers will be drawn to God by seeing the influence of God at work in our lives. As Christians, we do what we do for the sake of God, or as St. Ignatius, the founder of the Society of Jesus, put it, “*All for the Greater Glory of God.*” Or for those who prefer the Latin, “*Ad Majoram Dei Gloriam.*” It is the Jesuit motto. We don’t do good to get into heaven. We do good to be faithful to our nature as human beings made in the image of God. When we are faithful to that, we will give glory to God, and our getting into heaven will take care of itself. In the first century St. Ireneus put it this way: “*The glory of God is man (the human person) fully alive.*”

The late theologian Catherine La Cugna wrote, “*We are most fully human when we praise God, since this is the purpose for which we were made.*” And she adds, “*Just as all of creation glorifies God simply by being what it is, humanity is called to glorify God by speaking and living in constant thanksgiving.*” It’s all gift. She is simply building on St. Paul who said, “*We who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of God’s glory.* (Eph 1:12)” La Cugna continues, “*Everything that promotes fullness of humanity, that builds up relationships based on charity and compassion, glorifies God.*”

What makes God’s love believable in our world? Now, that’s the right question! How about resisting injustice, prejudice and hatred? That gives glory to God. How about fostering right relationships between people and nations in keeping with what God ordained, from the young couple in love to countries that share a common border? Everything that brings human beings closer to the communion for which they were made glorifies God. Sin is anything we do that does not give glory to God. Sin is manifested in our relationships to each other whenever we exploit or abuse

another human being; to ourselves whenever we show self hatred or self inflation; to the world through waste, consumerism and destruction; or to God by worshipping false gods or ignoring God all together. Maybe a good test of whether something is good or bad, right or wrong, is to ask, “*Does this give glory to God?*” If to give glory to God is why we were made, it could be the most critical question we ask. It will never be enough to say we that belong to the right church, or that we read the right scriptures, or even that we ate or drank with Jesus. Our lives should be giving glory to God, even when, maybe especially when, we are not thinking about it.

***Glory to God in the highest,
And peace to his People on earth.***

Giving glory to God and working for peace are the same thing. They reflect who we are as God’s children, all of us, made in the divine image. When I spend time in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, I witness to my belief in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. When I work for peace and justice, when I heal the broken by expressing God’s forgiveness, or give evidence of God’s compassionate mercy by inviting people to live in a loving and caring community where they can belong, then I make God’s love believable to the world.

This may shock you, but I don’t worry about going to heaven. That will be God’s gift to me. I’ll never earn it. I can only prepare myself to receive the gift by living the dignity I have as God’s child made in the Divine Image. As we still distort that image by our sinful actions, we now, again, turn to the Eucharist and to Jesus who gives himself to the Father for the Father’s glory. As we receive Jesus in Holy Communion, may he continue to transform our hearts to be more like his, the One in whose image we were created.