

26th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Cycle B

September 30, 2012 4 and 5:30pm

Saint Margaret Parish, Bel Air

No Salvation

Have you ever heard the expression “*Outside the church there is no salvation*”?

When I was a child, growing up in the 1950’s, I remember hearing that. In fact, I think I was taught that in my religion or catechism classes.

This expression – “*Outside the Church there is no salvation*” – goes way back in the history of the Church. Over the centuries, its original meaning became a bit distorted.

The result was that this saying was repeated right into the twentieth century, the 1900’s, in a way that was kind of exclusivist and elitist. That is how I learned it as a child.

It came across as meaning that all non-Catholics, including other Christians, and certainly non-Christians, are not able to be saved. Well, fortunately, along came the Second Vatican Council in the 1960’s.

Salvation for All

Pope John XXIII convened all the bishops of the world to this major meeting.

The purpose was to do in-depth reflection on the Church and its direction. This October marks the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council.

Well, one of the things that Vatican II did was to clarify the teaching about no salvation outside the Church. Vatican II first recognized that there is a fundamental unity among all Christians based on our common baptism.

Through baptism, the Holy Spirit is present and active in all of us. The significant conclusion: all Christians can be saved.

And then the Council went even farther. It recognized that 2/3rds of the world’s population are not Christian.

In some way, God must also draw to himself everyone to whom he has given life and breath. Everyone must in some way be included in the mystery of God’s saving love!

Well, at least for me, what a refreshing way to view God and what a positive clarification of our faith! And how consistent this is with the revelation of God that Jesus gives us!

Today’s Scripture

In today's gospel, one of the apostles is upset because someone who is not in their group is doing good things in Jesus' name.

Jesus tells them not to stop that person. He makes the significant statement: "*Whoever is not against us is for us.*"

So Jesus sees God present and acting in others who are doing good even if they are not one of his followers. He wants the apostles – and us – to resist the insider-outsider mentality.

He just wants us to look for good and affirm that as a sign of God's presence. So yes, salvation also happens outside the Church!

A Clarification

Now, I think we have to add that we Catholics still believe that Jesus is the fullness of God's revelation.

We believe that Christianity is the fullest and clearest way to God. And we also believe that our Church, that Catholicism has authentically passed on the core message of Jesus down through all the centuries.

No question, in our humanity, we have made mistakes and done some things we are not proud of. But, guided by the Holy Spirit, we believe that we have transmitted the authentic, core message of Jesus.

So, we still want to invite everyone to our Catholic community. It's something like having a full-course, gourmet meal.

We want everyone to be at this table and to have the full meal – of doctrine and moral teaching, of sacraments and spirituality and all the rest. We want to invite everyone to this.

Conclusion

I want to conclude with what today's readings lift up for us.

What a positive approach to God and faith and salvation we now see! What an open approach to all of humanity!

We are not to give in to the temptation of seeing faith and religion as a who's in, who's out, as an include, exclude exercise. Instead, we positively cherish Catholicism and want to share it.

At the same time, we respect all persons and see everyone as on a journey back to God and to salvation. This is the positive approach that motivates me and, I believe, should guide us in this 21st century of Christianity.