

## **Sunday Homily**

**Title:** Homily on Spiritual Evolution--Universalism

**Date:** August 24, 2025

**Sunday:** 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday of the Year (C cycle)

**Scripture:** Luke 13: 22-30

**By:** Fr Bob Schmitz

**Text:** Every so often, believers should reaffirm the big picture. By looking up at the horizon, we can stay the course. St. Paul had an expression that summarizes our future. At the end when all is complete, "God will be all in all." The resurrected Christ will overcome all evil, all pain, even death. Then, Christ will hand over the Kingdom to the Father, and God will be all in all. For a moment, imagine this end; note the inclusive reach: all peoples in perfect peace, all things in perfect harmony; all united in God's love. (1 Cor 15: 28)

St. John also gave us a hope-filled vision. At the conclusion of the book of Revelation, John envisions the coming of a new heaven and a new earth. He saw a new Jerusalem come down from heaven. There's no Temple in the new Jerusalem because "God's dwelling is with the human race." Then, John writes: "he will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away." God says: "behold I make all things new" (Rev. 21:45). Imagine the entire human race renewed in God.

I consider myself a realist; I am certainly not a wild-eyed optimist. I get all the bad news on my devices almost as soon as the bad stuff happens. The news, today, is presented with graphic pictures. We see the suffering resulting from the violence; we see the results of deprivation. The constant wave of bad news begins to depress us and begins to elicit fear. It can erode faith. I have a good friend, a very bright person.

She is overwhelmed by the evil and ugliness. She asked whether we are in the end-times as many read into the book of Revelation. They read the book for the destruction of everything good before Jesus comes in glory, But that's a terrible misreading of the Book of Revelation. Read that book all the way to the conclusion. It is not destruction; the conclusion is a new creation.

My friend's concern is like the question asked of Jesus in the Gospel: "will only a few be saved?" Jesus lived through bleak times. Rome had kept a stranglehold on Israel for over one hundred and fifty years. Rome was just the most recent oppressor. For over six hundred years, Israel suffered oppression from one power or other. Israel began to think EXCLUSIVELY. The number of good people on earth had shrunk to a few. Only those few, God's people, would be saved. Then, they became even more EXCLUSIVE. Over that long period of oppression, some began forecasting that only a remnant of God's people would be saved. A tiny subset of God's people has a chance; most people will be lost; in fact, most of God's own people will be lost. Goodness seemed to be diminishing.

Jesus's reaction is mind-boggling. "Enter through the narrow gate," he says. Consider your soul. Look within to find the Spirit of God. The Spirit will turn you outward to God, to God's goodness, and to the goodness in people everywhere. A faithful person cannot permit the bad news out there to sap their ability to find goodness, or to cause goodness, or to unite with others who seek goodness. No matter how threatening things seem, people who trust the God of goodness must keep their eyes fixed on the horizon of God saving.

Israel had moments that help us through the narrow gate. The first reading comes from the third prophet who used the name Isaiah. He had a vision of universal goodness. But the good people had to be gathered-in and invited to God's holy mountain. Such universalism teaches God's people, including us, to think INCLUSIVELY—to find the goodness in all people and to empower them to live their goodness. Jesus was repeating that inclusive thinking when he said: "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."

Jesus specifically warned us to avoid the type of thinking that sees only the negative. In this parable, negative, exclusive thinkers demand salvation from the master of the house saying: "We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets." Jesus said such thinkers will be tossed out into a place where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth." Negative exclusionary thinking, you see, will bring about a negative, exclusionary end.

Why is this a warning meant for us? My friends, when teaching and eating take place in the same New Testament sentence, think of what we do here at Mass. When we come to the Lord's Table, we are to anticipate God's time of harmony and love. And more, our Amen says we agree to work with Christ for that day. That's the narrow gate we are use. We keep eyes on the horizon looking for the day when God is all in all. And we join the Body of Christ, the church, in the ministries to build up hope for a new creation.