

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

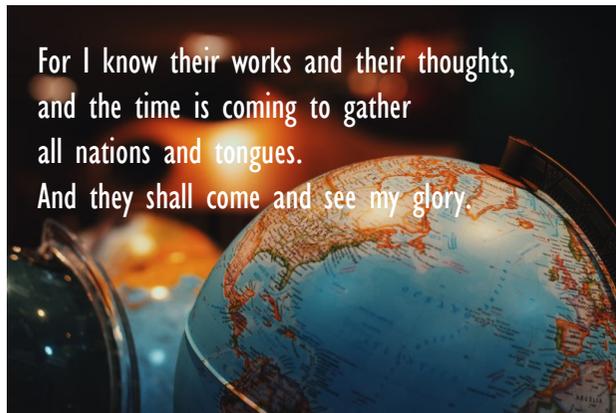
TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR C

First Reading Isaiah 66: 18–21

Today's passage comes from the end of the last chapter of the book of Isaiah. Three different authors are thought to have been involved in writing the book as a whole: the first Isaiah or 'Proto-Isaiah' (Ch. 1–40); the second, also called 'Deutero-Isaiah' (Ch. 40–55); and a third, 'Trito-Isaiah', the last ten chapters. Biblical scholars give historical reasons for this. By Ch. 40, the Israelites are in exile in Babylon and need comforting: they have to be reassured that their God has not abandoned them; whereas in the last chapters they are back home, beset with problems which are different from those of the first chapters. The style of the different parts of the book is also very different.

When today's passage was written, Jerusalem was struggling to regain its

former glory; people are attempting to rebuild their nation after their period of exile. Their morale is low. Once again God seems to have deserted them. So to shake them out of their dependency, the Lord promises a sign: the people of Israel will spread throughout the



world and bring back to Jerusalem in a triumphal procession Jews and Gentiles from all points of the compass.

Tarshish is in southern Spain; Put and Lud in Africa; Meshech, Rosh and Tubal are nations from the north (in present day-Turkey, near the Black Sea border); and the people of Javan are Greek settlers on islands in the Ionian sea.

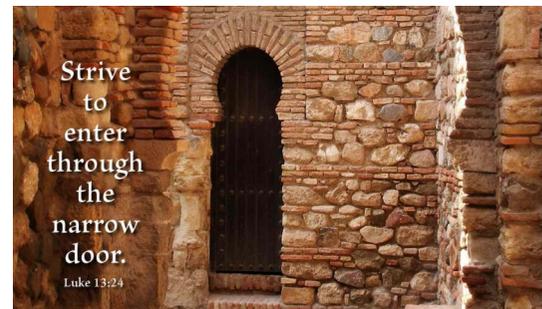
There is also one radical announcement. Contrary to the Prophets Ezekiel, Haggai and Zechariah, who restricted priesthood to only a few, Isaiah announces here that even foreigners would be able to become priests or Levites: i.e. people who oversee the work of the Temple, but do not have priestly functions.

Gospel Luke 13: 22–30

This week we continue to travel with Jesus on the way to Jerusalem. These verses seek to shake off people's complacency and encourage them to seek and trust in God.

'Will those who are saved be few?'

Jesus does not reply directly to this question, but shows in his response that it is not a matter of numbers, but rather the sort of person you are.



'Strive to enter'

The Greek word used here implies strenuous exercise of muscle, rather similar to an athlete in training. There is a sense of urgency in the command. Do it now. Do not wait until it is too late.

'Lord, open to us ... ' 'I do not know where you come from'

This episode is similar to the parable of the foolish bridesmaids in Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 25: 11–12). Where the people at the door come from is not so much a matter of geographical location; it has more to do with which family group they belong to, for this defined their social status.

We ate and drank in your presence and you taught in our streets

A casual acquaintance is not enough; what is important is the relationship you have with Jesus. Has knowing him made any difference to your life?

Weeping and gnashing of teeth

This is the only time this expression is used in Luke's Gospel, whereas it is used six times in Matthew.

People will come from east and west and from north and south

These are people from everywhere who put their trust in God. Being a Jew is not a guarantee of being admitted to the banquet. No one has an absolute right to be present by virtue of their birth.

Recline at table in the kingdom of God

This is the first time Luke mentions a banquet at the end of times, thus echoing Isaiah (25: 6–8).

The first and the last

Probably a contemporary proverb. Not only is no-one assured of a place, but they might not even be first in the queue.

