

Twenty-first Sunday *per annum*
Year C, 2025

Is 66:18-21
Ps 117

Heb 12:5-7, 11-13
Lk 13:22-30

Being saved

How many will be saved? Who will be saved? We cannot know the answer to the first question, for Jesus gives us no answer. Instead, Jesus answers a much more pertinent, but unasked question, which is our second question: who will be saved? Here's the short answer, based on the gospel reading today: if Jesus knows you, you will be saved. If *Jesus* knows you. Not if *you* know Jesus. There's a difference, as we'll see.

~Lord, open the door for us.

~I don't know who you people are. Good bye.

~Wait, wait. We were at the same parties. We attended your lectures. We're your biggest admirers and supporters.

~Yeah, I don't know you. Depart from me, you evildoers.

~Evildoers? Why do you call us evildoers? Don't you know that we go to Mass every Sunday and holyday of obligation? We send our kids to Catholic school. We vote strictly pro-life. We don't believe in divorce. (And if we ever got divorced, we certainly get annulments before we remarry so we can go to communion.) We pray the rosary as a family! We love the pope! How could you call us evildoers? How can you say you don't know us?

~You said you attended my lectures. Did you never hear me say: “Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones – *those who were hungry, thirsty, naked, ill, in prison, foreigners* – you did not do for me” (Mt 25:41ff)? So, yes. I don’t know you. And yes, you are evildoers. And yes, you will not enter. Go away.

And then there will be wailing and grinding of teeth as the wicked go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life (Mt 25:45).

So this is the biblical teaching. If Jesus doesn’t recognize you, know you, acknowledge you as one of his own, then there will be no entry for you into the kingdom of heaven.

~How, then, do I get Jesus to know me, since it’s clearly not enough that I know Jesus? Who knows Jesus so well that they could make an introduction for me? The pope? But does the pope know me? Who do I know who knows the pope? He’s an American, but it’s not like all us Americans know each other.

There’s a much simpler way, you know. There are people all around us whom Jesus knows very well, and if they were to speak up for us, it would go a long way. Jesus knows them, because he makes himself one with with them, identifies with them – those who are poor, those who mourn, those who are burdened, those who are hungry and thirsty, those who are forgotten and ignored, those who are lonely, friendless. Whatever you do in kindness for one of these least ones, you do for Jesus. Whatever you do in

kindness for them, they will remember it, and they will bear witness before Jesus, on the day of judgment, to your kindness to them.

It will not be our piety or our prayers that will save us. It will be that others – the least among us – will have spoken up for us, reminded the Lord that at some time we had treated them with kindness. An act of kindness. A *mitzvah*, as our Jewish friends would call it. “Do a good turn daily,” according to the Boy Scout slogan. A good deed for someone in need. It’s that simple. And it’s that important. Our salvation will hinge on how we treat those who can do nothing for us, on how we treat, not our so-called equals, but those who are “inferior” to us. So, starting simple...

Call your parents, your grandparents. Go visit them, if they’re still alive. Go see your elderly relatives or neighbors if they’re in the nursing home or homebound.

Talk to janitors, cashiers and stockboys, groundskeepers and housekeepers with respect and kindness. See them. Learn their names. Wave to them. Greet them when you come and when you go. A friendly gesture or a word of kindness to the foreign workers who are in our midst – *hola* or *buenas tardes* or *gracias por el trabajo* – might just be the act of solidarity and welcome that attracts the attention of the One whose notice means something to you, if eternal salvation means something to you.

Befriend the friendless. Invite them in, even if they don’t knock at your door. If you’re a kid at school, use whatever popularity,

position, or power you have to include, not to exclude; to lift up, not to cast down. If you're kind to the goofy kid, the weird kid, the awkward kid, the poor kid, the reclusive and angry kid, then on the day of judgment, that kid's testimony to your kindness decades before – a kindness you won't even remember but one they will have never forgotten – may be what saves you. And that's true for us grownups as well, at work and in our social circles and neighborhoods and networks.

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Sunday after next, on September 7, Pope Leo XIV will canonize Pier Giorgio Frassati, an Italian layman from Turin, a major city in the north of Italy. Frassati died at 24 years old in 1925. He was young, handsome, athletic, a good student, and came from a cultured upper middle-class family with social and political connections throughout Italy and Europe. However, Pier Giorgio used his social status not to lord it over others, but to serve them. He decided to become a mining engineer, not because it was a lucrative profession, but so that he could work among poor miners and their families and serve Christ in them. When he finished his university studies, his father offered him a car or the equivalent sum of money. Remember, this is in the early 1920s. He chose the money... so that he could spend it on the poor. Since his childhood, he had been like this. He helped the poor and lowly personally, through Catholic organizations like the St Vincent de Paul Society. As a young man, he joined Catholic Action and promoted the social reforms called

for by Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum novarum*. He even got arrested in Rome at the 1921 Young Catholic Workers Congress, while protesting Mussolini's authoritarian takeover of the Italian state and people. After his death in July 1925, as his funeral procession moved from the church to the cemetery, the streets of Turin were lined with thousands of mourners. The grateful poor whom Pier Giorgio had helped during his life turned out, unexpectedly, in droves, to pay their respects.

Pier Giorgio Frassati is remembered today because of his kindness, which he put into concrete and committed action. Because of that, we also came to learn that he was devout, pious, and prayerful. He was the privileged son of a rich father. And he used that privilege well, to become a servant to others, not to amass servants for himself, and so he built for himself treasure in heaven.

I believe that Pier Giorgio Frassati is in heaven, not just because the Church is about to canonize him. I believe that he is in heaven because the lowly and poor who knew him turned up in their thousands to bear witness to his kindness and Christian concern.

Jesus, too, knows who Pier Giorgio is, because the Lord hears the cry of the poor. From them the Lord knows the names of those who oppress and harass them. But from he also knows the names of those who offer them kindness and help, who treat them with decency and dignity, who deal with them with humanity.

When Pier Giorgio knocked, the door of heaven was opened wide, and we might imagine the Lord's words to him: "Hey, I know you. Pier Giorgio! I've heard lots about you! My little ones, they speak well of you. Come in, and well done, good and faithful servant. Come and share your master's joy."

So how many will be saved? We do not know.

Who will be saved? This we do know: those will be saved who are known to Jesus.

Does Jesus know me? He himself has told me how to make sure he knows me, and his words I can practically recite by heart.

Now, I only have to do it, and I will be saved, if I want to be saved. If I want to be saved, it's not enough for me to know Jesus; Jesus has to know me.