

21st Sunday, yr. C, Xavier Church, Isa. 66, 18-21; Ps. 117, 1-2; Heb. 12, 5-7. 11-13; Lk. 13, 22-30

Fr. Ward Biemans SJ

Dear brothers and sisters, a central concept in today's Gospel is that of justice. Those who do iniquity are told by the Lord Himself: 'Depart from me; I do not know where you have come from'. So, it is good to think about what justice means today. An example of the pursuit of justice that I would like to give is the assistance to refugees from Ukraine. It is clear that the people of Ukraine were forced to flee from their country by the Russian invasion. It is the biggest humanitarian crisis in Europe since the Second World War. The Ukrainians are being received in many countries in Europe and beyond, and many aid organisations are offering their services. One such organisation is the Jesuit Refugee Service, the JRS. The JRS and its partners have been on the front line of humanitarian aid since the beginning of the conflict, in Lviv in Ukraine itself, in Romania, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Moldova and countries in southern Europe. This includes providing shelter, food, basic goods, education, childcare, counselling, legal and psychological assistance. When we think of justice, we can also look closer to home, at how we treat the sick in our midst, the needy, the lonely. To what extent are we a support to them?

An underlying question that can concern us is: what is the point of all this suffering that war and other forms of injustice bring? There is no ready-made answer here. We must recognise that the Lord created us all, no matter where we come from or what our condition is. We are all children of God and therefore equal to each other, even if some need more help than others. The letter to the Hebrews, from which we heard in the second reading, does give a reason why suffering can happen to us, for we all receive our share of it.

It says: endure trials for the sake of discipline, for our good. For those who allow themselves to be formed by these trials, it produces the beneficial fruit of a holy life. By looking at the cross, at Jesus, we are confronted with our own mortality and we can see how we can better follow and serve him, to his glory.

In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah already announces a message of salvation: the glory of the Lord is not just for a certain group of people or certain kinds of people, but God is going to call all kinds of people together from all nations and languages to behold his glory. And in the Gospel, Jesus speaks of those who will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and they will sit down in the Kingdom of God.

The occasion for this hopeful answer of Jesus was the pressing question asked by a passer-by: 'Lord, are there few who are saved?' A question that will occupy every one of us from time to time. But the Lord does not mention a number of people who

will be saved. He does give a direct answer to the one who asks Him: 'Strive to the utmost to enter through the narrow door'. Such an answer is much more concrete than whether there are many or few who will be saved. And fortunately there are many people who make an effort, who contribute to a little more justice in this world, for instance by simply working on the basic services that war refugees need, or who care for the sick, for children, for the lonely, for the elderly. In all these ways, the Kingdom of God can come closer to them, too. Amen.