

Archbishop Lori's Homily: 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time; Resurrection Parish, Laurel

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Resurrection Parish, Laurel

(Delivered in Spanish)

Aug. 25, 2019

Are You Saved?

Years ago I had a conversation with a fellow passenger on an airliner. He noticed that I was wearing a Roman collar and saw that I was saying a rosary. He smiled and said, "Tell me, pastor, are you saved?" Not exactly the usual small-talk that people exchange when they're settling in for a long flight.

At that moment, I thought of two things: First, what does it mean to be saved? The answer I learned as child came to mind immediately: ". . . to know, love, and serve God in this life and to be happy with him in the next." Second was the question asked of Jesus in today's Gospel: "Lord, will only a few people be saved?" - As a sinner in need of God's mercy, I think about this question a lot.

So, in a matter of seconds, I gave this answer to my fellow traveler. "Yes," said I, "I was saved at my Baptism; And I am being saved by the Sacraments in which I participate; and I hope to be saved when my life is over, when I stand before Christ who will be my judge." I assure you, such an answer didn't come from me but from the Holy Spirit, and if so, perhaps we could spend a few minutes thinking about it: "I was saved at my Baptism; I am being saved by participating in the Sacraments; and I hope to be saved when I stand before Christ who will be my judge."

I Was Saved at My Baptism

First, let's begin with the fact that we were saved by being baptized. Some of you might have been baptized later in life but most of us were baptized as infants in the

arms of our parents. And you may ask: “Can it really be true that we were saved by being baptized as babies without giving our consent or understanding?”

The answer to this question is “yes” and here’s why. Being saved is not just a matter of doing enough good things to get to heaven. And it’s not merely one big decision we make sometime during our lives. No, being saved is first of all God’s work, God’s initiative. God acts first. Nothing makes this clearer than when an infant is baptized. God is working in the heart of that baby even before he or she knows about it. The child is freed from stain of original sin. The child becomes a son or daughter of the Heavenly Father and a member of the mystical Body of Christ, the Church. In Baptism, we were so closely identified with Christ that the Father could see and love in us what he sees and loves in Christ. So all of us can say that we were saved at Baptism.

I Am Being Saved by Participating in the Sacraments

But Baptism is not the end of the story but rather the beginning. It begins a life long journey of being saved in Christ Jesus. The Lord reaches out to us in many ways but the principal way we share in all the Lord did to save us is the Sacraments – the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, indeed all the Sacraments. To repeat, in the Sacraments, God always takes the initiative, God acts first. But God does so precisely to make it possible for you and me to respond to his love by living as the sons and daughters we became on the day of our baptism.

And the Lord knows that we need his help. He tells us in today’s Gospel that the way to salvation is narrow and difficult, that many will attempt to enter but not be strong enough. So in our weakness, God comes to our rescue and offers us the Sacraments. It is in the Sacraments of the Church that we are able to touch and receive the very power flowing from Christ’s death and resurrection. The sacraments act in us, strengthen us, and gradually move us from the old life of sin to the new life of grace – and to eternal salvation – but not without our willing it, not without our cooperation, not without our effort. As St. Augustine famously said, “Without God, I can’t. Without me, God won’t.”

Because we share in the Lord’s death and resurrection through the sacraments, we begin to see everything in our lives as an opportunity to grow in holiness. Take, for

example, the sufferings and misfortunes that come our way, whether it's illness, lack of money or employment, or the injustices we face, for example, the injustice of the broken immigration system in the United States. We may sometimes wonder why the Lord allows us to suffer these and other things, but the Letter to the Hebrews today tells us not to doubt the Lord's love for us. Just as parents discipline their children, so too the Lord disciplines us. In suffering we share personally in the Lord's sufferings; our hearts are purified. Thus the Lord is at work in our lives, working with us to bring about our salvation, gradually molding us into his son or daughter who is fit for the Kingdom of Heaven.

I Hope To Be Saved When My Life Is Over

Finally, we hope to be saved when our lives are over and we stand before Christ who is the judge of the living and the dead. It is part of our faith that when this earthly life is over, each of us will stand before the Lord Jesus who knows us better than we know ourselves. He will judge what we have done or what we have failed to do: whether we have allowed his grace to transform us, so that we are capable loving and receiving love for all eternity. Christ loves us and wants us to be saved, indeed he wants all people to be saved, but let us never take his love for granted nor miss any opportunity to prepare ourselves for that moment when we stand before Lord.

Conclusion: Surprises in Eternity

Well, that was my answer to my fellow passenger who asked if I were saved. It led us into a wonderful conversation about Jesus and his love. I've thought about that encounter when I prayed over today's Scripture readings, but also when I came across something that Archbishop Fulton Sheen wrote many years ago. Perhaps his words will resonate in your hearts as they do in mine. He wrote: "How God will judge my life I know not but I trust he will see me with mercy and compassion. I am certain, though, that there will be three surprises in Heaven. First of all, I think I will see some people whom I never expected to see. Second, I think there will be a number whom I expect who will not be there. And, even relying on God's mercy, the biggest surprise of all may be that I may even be there myself!"

May God bless us and keep us always in his love!