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21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Date: Sunday, August 24, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C
First Reading: Isaiah 66:18–21
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 117:1, 2 | **Response:** Psalm 16:15
Second Reading: Hebrews 12:5–7, 11–13
Gospel Acclamation: John 14:6
Gospel Reading: Luke 13:22–30
Preached at: the Chapel of Richartz House **in the** Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe**.**

The readings today speak of something we often find hard to hold together: God's wide welcome, and the narrow road He asks us to walk. The gates of the kingdom are thrown open, but the way is still steep. And yet this is our path—whether we are priests or students, elders or young people, born in Zimbabwe or elsewhere. We are invited to walk into this tension with open eyes and willing hearts, trusting that it leads us home.

Isaiah's vision comes from a broken time, after Jerusalem had fallen. Yet it looks forward with hope. God promises not only to gather back His people, but to bring in others—from Tarshish, Put, Lud, Tubal, Javan—distant places with strange names (likely referring to cities in Spain, Libya, Turkey or Greece.) These foreigners won't just watch from the sidelines. God says He will make them priests and Levites. That's astonishing. Those once barred from the sanctuary are now trusted with its centre. It would have sounded scandalous to many in Isaiah's day.

But Isaiah had already told us of God's house being a place for all people. God doesn't exclude—He gathers. The early Church Fathers saw this coming to life in Christ. Tertullian described the Church as Christ's bride drawn from every nation. Augustine wrote of priests chosen not by family line, but by grace. This is God's plan from the beginning—a Church for all, not defined by borders or blood, but by belonging in Christ.

Vatican II called the Church "the universal sacrament of salvation." It reminded us that grace can reach even beyond the visible boundaries of the Church. The Church is the People of God—called together in difference, learning to listen to

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one another and to the Spirit. That is synodality: walking together, each person valued, each voice heard. Communion doesn't mean sameness—it means unity within diversity. And when we live this well, we reflect the very heart of God.

Psalm 117, the shortest in the Bible, says the same: "Praise the Lord, all you nations." His mercy is not limited to some. It is wide as the August sky over Harare—clear, open, full of light.

Yet the tone shifts sharply in Luke's Gospel… A man asks Jesus, "Will only a few be saved?" Jesus doesn't give a number. He gives a challenge: "Strive to enter by the narrow door." Don't drift through life. Don't delay. Strive. The Greek word is *agonizomai*—a word for athletes in training, or soldiers in battle. This is not casual faith. It is hard-won trust, shaped in struggle, sharpened by grace.

But it's not because God is stingy. God wants all to be saved. Yet to enter the kingdom, we must change. We must undergo *metanoia*—a deep turning of heart, a reordering of our lives where God comes first. That takes grace. And we find that grace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, where Christ meets us, forgives us, and strengthens us. Confession is like the training ground for the soul—it keeps our hearts clear and our direction true, like regular training for a long-distance runner.

The parable Jesus tells is startling. Those who thought they were insiders find the door shut. Others—strangers from the east, west, north, and south—are welcomed in. This is a warning. It echoes what St Ignatius teaches: we must learn to see not as we do, but as God does. Who are we keeping outside? Who have we forgotten to welcome?

The Eucharist gives us a taste of this gathering—one table, one cup, many people. Reconciliation prepares us for that table, restoring us when we fall, helping us receive Christ with joy and humility.

Yes, the Church is the ordinary place of grace. But God's Spirit moves beyond our walls too. And yet, the call remains: strive. And we do so best when we walk in synodality, listening—especially to those on the edges. When we discern together, we become a sign of that kingdom: a Church both welcoming and serious about the Gospel.

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In our second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, we hear of discipline—not as punishment, but as love. God shapes us, like a potter with clay. It may hurt. But it brings peace. “Strengthen your weak knees,” the letter says. Words for us here in Zimbabwe, where drought and hardship weigh heavily. God doesn’t ask us to pretend we’re strong, but to keep walking—upright, together—clearing a path for others to walk too. Our wounds, when given to God, unite us with those who suffer in Gaza, Ukraine, Myanmar, Sudan, and in the prisons, shelters, and streets of our own country.

Discipline isn’t about toughness for its own sake. It’s about love. It’s about becoming more like Christ. The early Fathers compared it to an athlete training for the crown.

The Gospel acclamation reminds us why the door is narrow: because it’s not a rulebook. It’s a person. Jesus says, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” He doesn’t just show the way—He is the way.

And so we face this paradox: the welcome is wide, the door is narrow. The feast is for all, but the journey costs everything. Ignatius might ask: am I assuming I’m already in, without really entering? Am I standing at the threshold, unwilling to take the next step? Or am I ready—perhaps limping, but still willing—to move?

Catholic Social Teaching tells us that every person bears God’s image. Today’s readings sharpen that truth. Often it’s the ones we least expect whom God calls first. Here in Zimbabwe, where migrants are blamed, where tribalism still divides, where people are excluded because of who they are or whom they love—Isaiah’s words are loud: “Some of them I will take as priests.” The Church must listen to those pushed to the margins, recognising Christ among them. He was rejected too.

God’s kingdom turns our categories upside-down. And beyond our borders, we cannot look away from what is unfolding in the Holy Land—especially the killing and starvation of Palestinian civilians. Human beings are not expendable. God’s dream is not exclusion, but a house of prayer for all nations. A dream of peace, built on dignity.

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Jesus came to proclaim that world—not only to comfort, but to convert. Not just to affirm, but to transform. Even our failures, our small efforts, can become part of His glory—if we offer them to Him. The Eucharist we share is both the sign of God's wide welcome, and the strength to walk the narrow way.

So here we are—at the meeting place of mercy and holiness. The gates are open wide. But the road calls for our whole selves. It is the path of humility and courage. It is the path of Christ. It is also the journey of the Church, walking together, listening, discerning, and becoming the people God calls us to be.

And so I leave you with these questions:

- Where am I being asked to leave behind comfort, and step through the narrow door of deeper discipleship?
- Whom do I quietly keep at a distance—out of fear, judgement, or indifference? And how might God be asking me to see them with new eyes?
- What in me needs strengthening or healing, so I can walk more freely toward the kingdom?

May the Spirit steady your steps, lift your heart, and bring you to the feast where all are welcome.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.