

COMMENDATION OF ALL THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED - A
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What does it take for you and I to get to heaven?

The story is told of a certain lady died stood at the Gates of Heaven. She could look and see a beautiful banquet table set, with all her family members who had died before sitting and enjoying the feast. They all saw her and started waving and motioning her to come in. A saint appeared and said, "Hello. We've been waiting for you." And she said, "This is such a wonderful place, how do I get in?" The gatekeeper smiled and said, "All you have to do is correctly spell one word." "What is it?" She anxiously asked. "Spell love," he said. The woman smiled and spelled "l.o.v.e." and she was welcomed into heaven. About a year later, the same woman was on gate duty when her husband arrived unexpectedly. She said, "I am surprised to see you! How have you been doing?" He said, "Actually, I've been doing really well since you died. Do you remember that pretty nurse that took care of you? We fell in love and married a few weeks after you died. Then I won the lottery so we sold our little house and moved into a huge mansion. My new wife and I have been very happy and have been traveling all over the world. In fact we were just on a skiing trip to the Swiss Alps when I was caught in an avalanche, and that's why I'm here. By the way, how do I get in?" His ex-wife said, "All you have to do is spell one word correctly and you can enter heaven." He said, "OK, what's the word?" She smiled wryly and said, "Czechoslovakia."

If that's what it takes to get "saved," then some of us are in a bit of trouble! Who will be saved? That was the question being tossed around our minds as celebrate this All Souls day, a question that I'm sure you and I would love to hear the answer. What do we have to do to be saved? Do we simply have to spell a word or be nice to our neighbors? Jesus gives us a clue to his answer in today's Scriptures: many from all nations and languages will enter into his kingdom, but not those that you expect. The ones who will inherit eternal life are the ones who serve those most in need. Jesus is sort of the myth-buster of misconceptions about salvation in the Sacred Scriptures.

In the first reading, Isaiah emphasizes that the kingdom of God will be open to all. He says, "I will come to gather together nations of every language." Given the culture of Israel at the time, this is an important message - a myth-buster if you will. Many Jews believed that salvation was based upon your race and religious creed: you had to be Jewish to gain the rewards of eternal life. Isaiah debunks this myth noting that salvation is universal and goes beyond racial or religious beliefs.

The Gospel message, though, is a bit more stunning. Jesus tells us that many will try to enter the kingdom of God and will not be able to. Not everyone will be saved - yet another myth-buster! I'm sure that if you ask 100 people, 95% of them will say that they are going to heaven, but the Lord says that there will be banging and crying at the door, and it will not be opened.

The pathway to salvation is like a narrow gate: everyone has to go through the gate one at a time. You're not going to get through simply because you have a baptismal certificate or because you are Catholic. You're not going to get through simply because you're a priest or a deacon, or because you're pious and holy. You're not going to get through simply because you come to Church on Sunday. You're not going to get in by simply being able to spell out theology. Salvation requires

more than who we are or where we're from. Casual association, saying, "Lord, we ate and drank in your company - save us!" won't work. Who then will be saved?

The only ones who will be able to enter are those who have been willing to follow Jesus into Jerusalem: those who were willing to be transformed by sharing in the passion and death of the Lord Jesus - by worldly standards, those who are last. God wants us all to be saved, however we must work at finding a place in God's kingdom. Entry into God's kingdom is not granted automatically, and we cannot presume on God's mercy and do nothing by way of response to God's invitation.

We know that our God is a God of justice and mercy: which will prevail at our judgement remains to be seen. However, until that day, we are reminded that salvation requires more than just spelling a word to get it. Salvation requires our faith in God, our firmness of purpose and sharpness of vision, appropriate actions, and constant vigilance.

We are required to be more than simply Catholics on paper. What are some ways that we can go about waiting the day of our salvation? Our world affords us numerous opportunities to go out and do works of mercy for those in need. Our Church community offers copious spiritual exercises to keep our purpose and vision sharp. Perhaps the easiest way to prepare for our last day is to live each day as if it is our last: to constantly be prepared for whenever the Lord is ready to take us.

Salvation is open to all, be they Jew or Greek, black or white, male or female. And yes it's true, many will be saved, but not everyone! To get to heaven, you and I will have to do more than simply spell a word like Czechoslovakia or profess a religious affiliation. Salvation requires action, and that my friends is no myth!