

I was travelling by plane this week when I was away for a couple of days at South Uist in the Outer Hebrides for a friend's diaconal ordination. On the way back, for the hour or so journey between Benbecula and Glasgow, I was sitting beside a young lady, about thirty years of age. As you do on a journey, to pass the time, you get talking, and when we had exhausted chit-chat about the weather and the loveliness of the islands, we got to talking about why we were in Benbecula. She was, it transpired, a music teacher at a college there and she asked me why I was there. My opening remark that I was there for a celebration of course prompted the question 'what sort of celebration' and I told her that I was a Catholic minister, a deacon not a priest, who was attending an ordination. This caught her attention because she was an agnostic and she had never heard of any catholic minister other than a priest so she pushed me to explain what a deacon did, etc. She caught on quite quickly and told me that in her life she had never been introduced to Christ, even in a casual way, before telling me that her placement on Benbecula was a decision she had made to get away from a long-term relationship with her boyfriend who lived in Edinburgh, to where she was headed that night for a gig at the Festival. She said she intended to go back to him because absence had apparently made the heart go fonder and they both felt ready to continue their relationship, albeit at a distance of 270 miles for the next year or so. Because I had been reflecting throughout the week on today's Gospel, all of the time we were talking I kept thinking of the question Jesus is asked by the person in the gospel *Sir, will there only be a few saved?* and I pondered on whether or not she would be saved, someone who have never really ever learned of Christ or his teachings but probably lived, from the little I knew of her, a reasonable life.

There are two questions asked and answered in today's readings,

- 1 how can we achieve salvation?
- 2 who will be saved?

To the first, we are told that entry is not automatically guaranteed to those who have been baptised if that is all that happens in our lives. We will all be judged on how well we have used the opportunities given to us. For Jews, and by implication Catholics, who have heard the word of God and participated in the Eucharist, a higher standard will be expected than from someone, like my music teacher, who had never heard the word of God but who strive in their lives to do what is right. In the gospel two weeks ago when a man has had a great deal given him, a great deal is demanded of him, so it is likely that as Catholics, as Christians, who have been fortunate enough

to know the commandments of the Lord and what is expected of us, then for us the door will be narrower. To be saved, Jesus has to know us and for us to claim that we are baptised and listened to his Word but did nothing else will not cut much ice at the day of judgement. Much rather perhaps our music teacher who despite not hearing the word may still lived out a proper life.

As to how many will be saved, the questioner is probably wanting to ask *how many will be saved?* or *will I be saved?* but is trying not to be so obvious. In the first reading from Isaiah, the Lord says that he is coming to gather the nations of every language and in the Gospel we are given the image of a great feast to which people from north and south, east and west, will take their place at the banquet. So it is likely to be a sizeable event. How do we get there? In the first sentence of the Gospel today, we read that Jesus went teaching through towns and villages, making his way to Jerusalem. Luke offers us this image of Jesus being fixed and focused on getting to Jerusalem several times in his Gospel, despite that fact that Jerusalem would mean suffering and death for him, but by doing so he would complete his Father's plan of salvation through his brutal death. The narrow door we have to enter is Christ himself and in our lives we should be focused and fixed on the journey to our Jerusalem, the invitation to the Lord's banquet in heaven. And who will we meet if we get there? Who knows? Perhaps even our music teacher!