

# "FIRST IMPRESSIONS"

21<sup>st</sup> SUNDAY -C- *August 24, 2025*

[Isaiah 66: 18-21; Psalm 117; Hebrews 12: 5-7, 11-13; Luke 13: 22-30](#)

by *Jude Siciliano*, OP

## Dear Preachers:

Have you read any good books lately? Many of us seem to be reading fewer books these days. Perhaps that's because we have the convenience of audio books—or maybe we're just too busy!

Some years ago, among the most popular books were the Harry Potter series and the Left Behind books by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. The Left Behind series, which began in 1995, eventually spanned 11 volumes and sold over 40 million copies.

The series claims to be based on the Book of Revelation – that vivid, symbolic book of dreams, visions, and multi-headed beasts. Revelation is filled with visionary writing and supercharged poetic imagery. Originally, it was meant to console a persecuted Church, proclaiming that God would ultimately triumph, and that goodness would not be defeated. For Christians suffering under persecution, when evil seemed to be winning, Revelation offered a word of hope.

But the Left Behind series takes the poetic and symbolic language of Revelation literally.

People have always worried about how history will turn out. Is there a moral order in the universe? We want to believe that good is more powerful than evil, that justice will prevail, that light will triumph over darkness. The Left Behind books try to offer answers and encouragement. They claim that there is more to live for than our pleasures and endless desires. They say the Bible supports the idea of a "Rapture" that will come suddenly – like a flash of lightning – when Jesus will return to take a chosen few to heaven, leaving the rest behind.

There will be bliss for a few and grief for the many – the "left behind." Brides will be abandoned at the altar, families will mourn loved ones taken from them, while the rest of the world, now deemed evil, is left to suffer. In one scene, hundreds of airline passengers are screaming to their deaths while one of the pilots – being among the saved – is "raptured" and escapes.

For people weary of the pain and evil in the world, the Left Behind series can seem like a source of consolation. It encourages them to "stay the course," "don't give up," and assures them that "good will triumph."

You can hear the same concerns even among Jesus' disciples. They also had questions: "Who's in? Who's out?" Today's Gospel captures their anxiety in the question they ask Jesus: "Lord, will only a few be saved?" The question suggests that they, too, were dismayed and disappointed by the state of the world. Some today might echo their feelings: "The world is going to hell in a handbasket."

Their question also implies that they think they are among the few chosen. Like the Left Behind books, they assume that most will be cast off. Maybe they want Jesus to preach a strong message of hellfire and damnation – to shake people up and scare them into turning to God.

In the Left Behind series, after the Rapture, there are seven years of intense tribulation – ruled by Antichrist regimes, nuclear war, famine, and plagues.

Then – as now – fear is often used as a way to get people to "shape up." But is that how we think the Prince of Peace will return? (Later in the liturgical year, especially in November, we'll hear Scriptures about the Second Coming.) But we must ask: Would God want the horrors described in the Left Behind

books? Do we really believe only Christians will be saved? (Our Church does not teach that.) What about Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, and others?

What kind of relationship with God would it be if it were based on fear rather than love?

So when the disciples ask if only a few will be saved, Jesus doesn't give a number. Instead, he redirects the question back to them. Their concern shouldn't be about others – it should be about their own lives. Membership and proximity to Jesus – eating with him, hearing his teachings – do not guarantee entry into God's kingdom.

In effect, Jesus says, "If you think you are first, you may find yourselves last." And, "You'll be surprised who will enter through the narrow gate."

At this point in the Gospel, Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem. "He passed through towns and villages..." We know how this journey ends. We know that God will overcome evil – not by force or destruction, but through the cross of Christ. Through suffering and seeming defeat, Jesus' love and fidelity to God reconcile and save the world.

Perhaps the "narrow gate" Jesus speaks of – the one he tells us to strive to enter – is the difficult but essential call to continue loving, even those who hurt or repel us. That's what Jesus did. So what of the future? In a way, it has already been decided: Peace is stronger than violence.

Jesus puts the question before us: Will we choose the narrow gate of love, or the wide road of fear and retribution?

Scaring the hell out of people sells 40 million books and makes for a best-seller. But God has chosen another path. God has entered our world through the narrow gate of love – and has flung it wide open for us to enter, too.

**Click here for a link to this Sunday's readings:**  
**<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/082425.cfm>**