

## **TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

*Gospel: Luke 13:22-30*

Jesus went through one town and village after another, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, "Lord, will only a few be saved?" He said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able.

When once the owner of the house has got up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us,' then in reply he will say to you, 'I do not know where you come from.' Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' But he will say, 'I do not know where you come from; go away from me, all you evildoers!'

There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out. Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God. Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

### **REFLECTION 1: ENTERING BY THE NARROW DOOR**

Cattle stampedes can be dangerous. Anything unusual can start a stampede, especially at night. Lightening, fireworks or even striking a match can set cattle off. It's believed that the stampede response evolved to help animals to escape predators and maybe that's why humans stampede to save themselves. Unfortunately it often has the opposite effect. For instance in 1896, at the coronation of the Russian Czar Nicholas II, a crowd estimated at half a million people stampeded trying to get gifts from the Czar; 1,389 people were trampled to death and 1,300 injured.

In today's Gospel reading (Luke 13: 22-30) someone asks Jesus if only a few would be saved? Jesus' reply conjures up images of humanity in a desperate last minute stampede to get into heaven. Jesus said, 'try to enter through the narrow door. Many I tell you will try to enter and be unable'. Now, to look at this passage as if it has only to do with after life, only concerns heaven doesn't make much sense. But if on the other hand, Jesus is referring to the stern demands of life here and now in this world – then this passage makes a great deal of sense. After all, most of the best things in life can only be obtained through the narrow door – the lesser things in life through the wider door.

For instance, if a student going to college wants to get a good education, then he/she must pay the price in terms of self-discipline and hard work, 'scorning delights and living laborious days' – the narrow door. But if all that is required is to cover the course in order to say one went to college, then, all that is required is to attend a few lectures and read a few books – the wider door. Or, take another example; if a man and a woman want a good marriage and are anxious to build a happy home, then they must put the needs of others above their own. They must overlook faults and minor irritations; they must work through their differences and resolve their disagreements. They must forgive and forget. On the other hand if all they want is a casual affair, the demands are far less rigorous and that's the wider door. All they need do is put up with one another until they become bored and then they can go their separate ways.

At the time of Jesus, most Jews, in answer to the question, 'Lord will only a few be saved?', thought that all Israelites had a share in the world to come. These would constitute the 'few' as compared to the 'many' tax collectors, sinners and gentiles who would be excluded. So, Jesus' response was probably an

unwelcome affront to them. Particularly to those who presumed that their salvation was assured by virtue of their ancestry. Jesus warned of a 'narrow gate', the entrance to which was not determined by bloodlines, but by recognition of Jesus as the God-given way to salvation. Acceptance of Jesus, his identity, his mission, his teachings, his challenges and above all his cross, as the means whereby God chose to extend salvation to sinners – all these acceptances constitute entrance into the kingdom by the narrow way.

Jesus also told of closed doors and locked doors with people outside knocking. But their pleas for admission were denied. In terms of time, we live with constantly closing doors and once closed they can never be opened again. The door for today will be closed at 12 midnight tonight. We will never be able to live this day again. So, whatever act of kindness we can do today, let us not defer or neglect it, because we will not walk this road again.

## **REFLECTION 2:**

## **THE DOOR**

When the anonymous questioner asked in today's Gospel (Lk: 13: 22-30) 'Sir, will there be only a few saved?' it would be on the assumption that the kingdom of God was for the Jews only and that Gentiles would all be shut out. Jesus' answer must have come as a shock to him. Jesus declared that entry to the kingdom can never be automatic but is the result and the reward of a struggle. 'Keep on striving to enter', Jesus said. The word for 'striving' is the word from which the English word 'agony' is derived. The struggle to enter in must be so intense that it can be described as an agony of soul and spirit. We must always be going forward or necessarily we go backwards. Jesus' reply conjures up images of humanity in a desperate last-minute stampede to get into heaven. Jesus said, 'try to enter through the narrow door, many I tell you will try to enter and be unable'. To look at this passage as if it has only to do with afterlife, only concerns heaven, doesn't make much sense. But if on the other hand, Jesus is referring to the stern demands of life here and now in this world - then this passage makes a great deal of sense.

The Christian way is like a climb up a mountain path way towards a peak which will never be reached in this world. It was said of two gallant climbers who died on Mount Everest; 'when last seen they were going strong for the top'. They died climbing, for the Christian life is constantly an upward and onward way.

The defence of those people who heard Jesus' words, 'we ate and drank in your presence and you taught in our streets'. There are those who think that just because they are members of a society based on Christian principles all is well. But those who live in such a society are not necessarily Christians. They may be enjoying all its benefits and are certainly living on the Christian capital which others before them have built up. That is no reason for sitting back content that all is well. Rather it challenges us - we cannot live on borrowed goodness.

There will be surprises in the kingdom of God. Those are very prominent in this world may have to be very humble in the next. There is a story of a man who had been used to every luxury and was much respected. He died and when he arrived in heaven, an angel was sent to conduct him to his home. They passed many lovely mansions and the man thought that each one, as they came to it, must be the one allotted to him. When they had passed through the main streets they came to the outskirts where the houses were much smaller, until they arrived at a house which was little more than a hut. That is your house said the conducting angel. 'What' said the man, 'is that?', 'I cannot live in that'. 'I am sorry said the angel, but that is all we could build for you with the materials you sent up'.

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