

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time "C"

Today's Gospel poses one of the most vexing and controversial questions that any religious or spiritual person could ask.

The question is one that I would be willing to bet has popped into every one's mind in one form or another at least once. "**Lord, will only a few people be saved?**" It might be re-phrased, "**Lord, who will be saved?**" "**Who will get into Heaven?**" ..."**Many? ....Most? ...All?.....Will I be Saved?**"

The interesting thing about this Gospel is that Jesus never answers the question. He doesn't say yes or no, he gives no number. Why doesn't Jesus just give us a straight answer? After all, it's a pretty straight question, right?

One possibility is that He is trying to block one of the most dangerous tendencies in the spiritual life, which is a sort of **fussy preoccupation** with how I am doing.

When I spend my spiritual energy gauging and judging and trying to determine how well I am **doing** spiritually, chances are pretty good that I am not doing so well.

For example.....When I was younger, I played a lot of baseball. I really wanted to be a good hitter. I read books on it, I studied the swings and stances of Joe DiMaggio and Ted Williams. I listened to my coaches... and as soon as weather allowed it, I played or practiced almost every day of the week. I worked on my timing and keeping my eye on the ball. The problem was that, when I got to the plate during a game, I was so busy analyzing and trying to remember everything, I wasn't hitting the ball! It wasn't until I got into my sophomore year in high school that I finally started to do really well. By then, all that I had learned and practiced had become so much a part of me, that I no longer analyzed or fussed about what I was supposed to be doing at the plate, I just did it. It had become like a part of my DNA. I carried a .260 average that year!

One can apply that example to golf swings, our occupations and even our hobbies .....as well as... to our spiritual life.

If I am busy thinking about, fussing about, whether I'm in, how am I doing, am I saved, then the odds are that I am not getting on with the business of salvation.

(PAUSE)

One of our most common human faults is that we tend to exalt ourselves at the expense of others. It started with Adam...Look Lord, she gave me the fruit....it wasn't my fault!

This reaches it's lowest point in a religious context. It becomes religious elitism. We gossip, we assume things, speculate things about others.

"Well, I know I'm following the commandments, I'm doing what I am supposed to do, I'm probably going to heaven.....but what about him?....What about her?" And by extension we might add "Frankly, I doubt that either one is saved."

But in the Gospel, when Jesus gets this question off the table, when he shifts the focus away from the person who asks it, He tells him to do something. He said, "**Strive to enter through the narrow gate.**"

Why a gate and why is it narrow? The narrow gate in a walled city like Jerusalem was exactly the size of one person. During an attack, it could not be entered by a rush of people, but only one by one ....assuring that each person is recognized.

We know that in John's gospel Jesus says "I AM the gate, I'm the way in. No one gets in except through me."

The Gospel of Luke reminds us that the gate is narrow precisely because it is in the very shape of Jesus Himself, and entrance through the gate

involves conformity to His state of being. We will be recognized at the gate by how much we resemble the gate. It like a square peg in a square hole kind of thing.

**“Strive to enter through the narrow gate.”** is saying that we must strive to enter into the life of Salvation by re-forming ourselves, by shaping ourselves to Jesus. To think as He thinks, to see as He sees, to do as He does.

If you only take one thing away from this homily today, I hope it is not my sophomore batting average. (.260) I hope you take away a sense that Heaven is not a “reward” for having performed well to a set of rules. That was the legalism of the Pharisees. It is the slavery of Islam. And is bondage to the Christian.

What salvation (our entry into Heaven) is, is conformity to Christ. Becoming a person of compassion, of love, of peace and of forgiveness. Jesus says **“many will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough.”**

This is no easy task. It isn't meant to be easy. If it were, then the gate would be wide.

The good news is that we are not left to this on our own.

The whole Sacramental life, the whole of theology, of scripture, of teaching, of the liturgy, of prayer and ideally even the homilies we hear, all of it is, geared to conforming us to Christ.

To be a Catholic, is to have access to all Seven Sacraments, to not only eat in the presence, but to eat the very presence of... the Lord. It is to be in the possession of the fullness of truth and revelation! To be sure, this is a privilege, but it is not given so that we can be satisfied and rest in what we have.

In our first reading, God speaks to the people of Israel, the chosen of God and says: **“I come to gather nations of every language; I will set a sign**

**among them; to the distant coast lands that have never heard of my fame, or seen my glory; and they shall proclaim my glory among the nations. They shall bring all your brothers and sisters from all the nations as an offering to the LORD.”**

As we become more and more like Christ, we are that sign, we are a light unto the nations.

Only two weeks ago Jesus told us that **“Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.”**

We are to be a conduit of Gods grace, not for our own glory, but for the glory of God, precisely because we have been given so much.

I get off track when I look inward to verify my salvation status, when I cling to my privilege as a Catholic, when I think to myself, “I’m saved and he’s not”. That is when I dam up the grace of God given to me in Baptism.

The problem is a fussy focus on ourselves. The answer is forgetting ourselves in love..... which makes us like Christ who is the one through whom the divine graces flows.

Let me suggest this. If we ever find ourselves like that person in the Gospel today, preoccupied with that **worry** of our salvation. If we find yourselves asking “Am I saved... am I in?” ....Forget about it... and perform a simple act of love.

Write a letter to someone who might need encouragement. Visit someone who might be lonely or sick. Care for someone who needs your care. Say a decade of the rosary for someone else’s intention. Offer up your Holy Communion for a friend. In doing this we get out of ourselves and we become a pipe line of the divine grace.

“Lord, who will be saved?” Perform an act of love and you will find the answer.

