

21st Ordinary Sunday

Homily: Fr. Shijo George

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There was once a special offer at a place that was open to everyone. The only condition to the offer was that people may choose whatever they liked from the items on display. There were many beautiful items to choose from, and people chose things that were easy to find and were pleasing to the eye. A man from the crowd browsed through the items and instead of selecting the attractive items, picked a stone that no one noticed or wanted. Seeing what he had taken, his acquaintances and friends began to make fun of him and insulted him by calling him stupid. They shouted: "Hey, you are just carrying a stone. Throw it away and pick up something useful!" He ignored them and walked away. To him that was a precious stone. In the great rush to grab the items, those who sought to acquire valuables did not recognize that that stone was a vital part of all the things that were there. Through being observant and vigilant, focussed on looking for the most important and precious thing, and not being influenced or listening to the clamour of the surrounding crowd, and stepping out from the crowd, helped the man to notice the most valuable thing in his life and to acquire it. Similarly, sometimes there is a need to walk alone, apart from the crowd, to find the most precious treasure; in this case, focused only on the inestimable stone.

Jesus calls our attention to the most invaluable gift we could ever have, or the reward of a good life: Heaven. The curious question from today's Gospel is: "Lord, will only a few be saved?" The answer from Jesus directs our attention to choose a way that many may not opt for; "entering through the narrow door."

The attraction and influence of wide doors and wide ways are easy and seem convenient. Even during the time of Jesus, false prophets promised 'salvation' through a relaxed approach to life, and many believed those false prophets and



followed their teachings. Jesus calls us to set ourselves apart from popular choices that are easy and pleasurable. As he invites all his listeners to enter through this narrow door, here, Jesus is the true door; though not an easy one to pass through. In the Gospel according to St. John (10: 9), Jesus says: “I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.” Jesus is the gate through which one can enter Life Eternal. Hence, the passage serves as a warning against believing in false prophets portrayed as leading people toward the wide, easy path of destruction and doom, instead of the difficult, challenging narrow path of life. By contrasting the two gates, or two corresponding ways of life, Jesus highlights that false prophets offer a deceptive message of easy discipleship that results in destruction, and that the followers must be able to discern their true motives by the fruits of their labour.

Upon reflection, comparing the narrow gate and the wide gate is like comparing chalk and cheese. It cannot go together. By comparing the two, Jesus brings this to the attention of his listeners and asks his listeners to choose the narrow one. To go through the narrow gate is to live a life that accepts Jesus' way and his teachings.

How does one enter through the narrow gate? Jesus didn't say ‘try to enter’ but ‘strive to enter.’ It is important to ‘strive’ to enter through the narrow gate. To ‘try’ is a low-level attempt or effort without a deep desire and commitment toward fulfilment. To ‘try’ even stops when things get difficult and challenging, and when it involves the need to make sacrifices. To ‘strive’ is totally different. It implies making a great, sustained effort against any and all enormous challenges, and making lots of sacrifices with deep determination, dedication, and commitment to finally achieve success.

Here are a few recommendations for getting through the narrow door that is Jesus.

The follower should have full allegiance to Jesus' teachings; as a spiritual choice and a lifestyle. It requires commitment and unwavering self-denial. When we travel through narrow doors we know that it requires a lot of self-sacrifice and decisions. For instance, we have to bend our bodies low, downsize our luggage, and sometimes even lose body weight so that we can squeeze our bodies through the narrow passage. Using the same metaphor, we may have to downsize our egos; terminate and dump the unwanted luggage of our sins, selfishness, and anything that keeps us away from Jesus; avoiding stiffness in our soul and being flexible with the virtues of life. In this way, as Jesus said, the "yoke becomes easy" to carry and life becomes more flexible to pass through the narrow door. A complete transformation of life and a change of heart is what Jesus demands from his followers.

In Psalm 1:1-4, the two ways are clearly proclaimed: "Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away."

As we journey on the narrow way to the narrow door, we may sometimes fall, but let us get up and start to walk again. We may get hurt along the way, but let us be healed through the Sacraments.

May we persistently walk on the narrow path of Jesus' way, and let us not try but strive to enter through the narrow door ourselves.