

HOMILY for 21st SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year C

After a long illness, a woman died and went to Heaven. While she was waiting for St. Peter to greet her, she peeked through the Pearly Gates. When St. Peter came by, the woman said to him, “This is such a wonderful place. How do I enter?”

“You jus have to spell a word,” St. Peter told her.

“Which word?” the woman asked.

“Love.”

The woman correctly spelled “L-o-v-e,” & St. Peter gladly welcomed her into Heaven.

About a year later, St. Peter came to the woman & asked her to watch the Gates of Heaven for him that day. While the woman was guarding the gates, her husband arrived. “I’m surprised to see you gain,” the woman said, “How have you been?”

“Oh, I’ve been doing pretty well since you died,” her husband told her. “I married that wonderful nurse who took care of you while you were ill. And then I won the lottery. I sold the little house you & I lived in & bought a big mansion. And my new wife & I traveled all around the world. While were on vacation, I went water skiing today. I fell, the ski hit my head, & I drowned. Here I am now. What do I have to do to get in Heaven?”

“You have to spell a word,” the woman told him.

“Which word?” her husband asked.

“Djibouti!”

As you can see in the cute story, it’s not that easy to go through the Gate of Heaven with a test like that. Anyway, one of the issues that many Christians have been interested in over the years is salvation. We Catholics might not talk about salvation every day. But, our Christian counterparts are constantly worried about salvation. That’s why we’ve seen many Christians often ask us, “Have you been saved?” For those devout Christians, being saved means that we have to be baptized in the water and the Holy Trinity into the Church of Jesus Christ. Only then would we be able to secure for ourselves a place in Heaven with Jesus after this life. But, as you can imagine, salvation is not as easy as being baptized in the water and the Holy Trinity. That’s why we’ve learned in today’s Gospel that someone asked Jesus, “Lord, are there just a few who are to be saved?” This person knew full well that salvation and having a place in Heaven is much difficult for most people. For there’re all kinds of temptations in this world to keep them from the Gate of Heaven. Only people who are committed to that goal would achieve salvation and a place in Heaven in the end.

Here’s how Jesus answered that question about salvation for us. He replied, “Try to come through the narrow gate. Many, I tell you, will try to enter and be unable to.” He added, “Once the master of the house has risen to lock the door and you stand outside knocking and saying, ‘Sir, open for us.’ He will say in reply, ‘I do not know where you come from.’...There will be wailing and grinding of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets safe in the Kingdom of God, and you yourselves rejected.... Some who are last will be first and some who are first will be last.”

Let’s try to unpack Jesus’ answer above. First of all, Jesus advised His followers to go through the narrow gate if they want to enter Heaven and experience salvation. A gate usually represents the separation of two different sides: a safe side and a dangerous one. A gate is used to keep out something dangerous or someone bad. We wouldn’t need a gate if the world is filled with only good and loving people. Apparently, Heaven also needs a gate because it needs to keep bad people and evil spirits from entering it. But, the Gate of Heaven is not wide and big. Jesus reminds us that the narrow gate is surely the one that leads to Heaven. That’s why many people will have a

tough time to choose the narrow gate and go through it. If the Gate of Heaven is narrow, then the Gate of Hell must be wide and big.

What does it mean for us to go through a narrow gate? If you've ever had to walk through a small entrance, you would feel how uncomfortable it would be. You would have to be careful to weave yourself through it. Otherwise, you might get stuck. Spiritually speaking, going through the narrow gate means that we'll have to make a lot of sacrifices & endure all sorts of sufferings in this life. Most of us do not like suffering and sacrifices. That's why our Christian Church in modern time does not discuss those issues regularly. It prefers to talk about a comfortable lifestyle and all the rights of a religious believers that our American Constitution guarantees us. However, today Jesus wants to remind us to go through a narrow gate and endure all the sufferings and sacrifices of this life if we want to achieve eternal life in Heaven someday.

Another way of looking at suffering and sacrifices is presented to us by St. Paul in today's Second Reading. He says, "...Endure your trials as the discipline of God who deals with you as sons and daughters. For what son or daughter is there whom the father does not discipline? At the time it is administered, all discipline seems to be a cause of grief and not for joy. But, later it brings forth the fruit of peace and justice to those who are trained in its school." So, evidently out of suffering, we would experience peace and justice and appreciate those gifts a lot more in our lives. We would argue and fight less with one another. Instead, we would search for peace and promote justice much more in our daily lives.

The second thing that I want to point out in Jesus' response about salvation in today's Gospel is that we should not procrastinate in preparing ourselves to go through the Gate of Heaven. Why? Because it will be closed suddenly one of these days. Once that happened, we will not be able to say or do anything to get the master of the house in Heaven to open the gate for us. We can claim that we've known him and try to use that influence to get him to open the Gate of Heaven for us. But, he'll say, "I do not know you. Away from me, you evildoers." It's sad that we do not see the Church emphasizes on the urgency of getting ourselves through the Gate of Heaven. Instead, it is wasting its time and effort to fight over political and social issues. It does not seem to pay attention to Jesus' warning in today's Gospel. It continues to mislead its members and focus on this world instead of Heaven. So, unless you want to be locked out of Heaven, I suggest that you would make sure to get yourself through the Gate of Heaven first before doing anything else here on earth. Otherwise, you'll be rejected and standing outside of that gate for eternity.

The last thing that Jesus wants to remind us is that people all over the world will try to take their place at the Feast in the Kingdom of God. Some who are last will be first, and some who are first will be last. In other words, we might think that we know God and have figured out a way to be the first person in the Kingdom of God. But, Jesus again warns us that we might be the last person there if we do not follow His teachings. Sadly, that might be the attitude of many Christians these days. They think that they know everything and do not take Jesus' messages seriously. That's how they would end up to be the last person in Heaven.

My dear brothers and sisters, I do not know about you, but I and many Christians are concerned about our salvation. We want to make it through the Gate of Heaven after this life. Because of that, we'll try to make sacrifices and endure lots of sufferings in this life. That's how we can prepare ourselves to go through the narrow gate and make it to the other side of the Gate of Heaven after this life.