

## HOMILY for 21<sup>st</sup> SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year C

This Sunday's Gospel talks about the narrow gate of Heaven & salvation. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this favorite cute story that I'd like to share with you.

A man dies & goes to Heaven where St. Peter meets him at the Pearly Gates. St. Peter says, "Sir, you need 1,000 points to make it into Heaven. Now, tell me all the good things you've done, & I give you a certain number of points for each item. When you reach 1,000 points, the Gates will open & you may get in."

"Okay," the man says, "I was happily married to the same woman for fifty years & never cheated on her, not even in my mind."

"That's wonderful," says St. Peter "that's worth two points!"

"Two points?" he says. "Well, I attended church all my life & gave my ten percent tithe faithfully."

"Terrific!" says St. Peter. "That's definitely worth a point & half."

"One point & half? My goodness! Well, what about this: I started God's Kitchen in my city & worked in a shelter for the homeless?"

"Fantastic, that's good for two more points," he says

"TWO POINTS!" the man cries. "At this rate, the only way I can get into Heaven is by the grace of God!"

"Now, that's what we're looking for! Come on in!"

Anyway, Heaven or eternal life is the last thing people would think about. Most of the time, people would focus on this world & be concerned only on worldly things. For their hearts are simply with the treasures of this world. This Sunday's Gospel is one of the rare occasions in the Bible that someone would come up to Jesus to ask about Heaven & salvation. Here is how the Gospel reports about it, "...Someone asked Him [Jesus], 'Lord, will only a few people be saved?' He answered them, 'Strive to enter through the narrow gate; for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough. After the master of the house has risen & locked the door, then will you stand outside knocking & saying, 'Lord, open the door for us.' He will say to you in reply, 'I do not know where you are from.' And you will say, 'We ate & drank in your company; & you taught in our streets.' Then, He will say to you, 'I do not know where you are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!'"

Apparently someone was curious to find out from Jesus whether only a few people would be saved. He did not tell the crowd the exact number, but advised them to get to Heaven through the narrow gate if they would want to be saved. For many would want to enter that place, but would not be able to do it. So, the first secret that Jesus revealed to us about Heaven & salvation is that it is protected & secured by the narrow gate. The world usually picks the widest/biggest door it could find to get to any place. For it wants an easy & comfortable way to do everything. But, Jesus reminds us today to choose the narrow gate & do things that might look difficult in the eyes of the world to help us get to Heaven. Therefore, we need to practice Jesus' Commandments of love by loving God with all our hearts & minds & loving our neighbors as ourselves. Moreover, we got to push ourselves to love even our enemies & reconcile with God & one another as Jesus commanded us.

As you might know, it is always easy to talk about Jesus' Commandments of love. But, it's much harder for us to practice them every day. We might pray & come to church without

any problem when everything goes well in our lives. But, when we encounter some problems in our lives or a few of our prayers might not get answered as we wish, we would put our prayer life on hold or turn away from God altogether. Likewise, we might love our neighbors when they treat us kindly or when they get along with us. But, when our neighbors are not nice to us, we would not love them as ourselves. Unfortunately, we have seen this situation happen often in the Church & our country as well. One side would claim to be conservative while the other might be progressive. Or, one group would have a certain agenda or stand on some issues while another group might take on a different agenda or stand. Both sides would not put aside their differences & find a compromise for the sake of the common good. The narrow gate for Jesus means that we all must make some personal sacrifices & learn to love our neighbors & the common good if we would like to be saved & make it to Heaven on the Last Day.

In case we are not clear on how to get through the narrow gate, this Sunday's Second Reading has the following explanation for us, "...Endure your trials as the discipline of God, who deals with you as sons & daughters. For what son/daughter is there whom the father does not discipline? At the time it is administered, all discipline seems a cause for grief & not for joy, but later it brings forth the fruit of peace & justice to those who are trained in its school." So, we are advised to endure our trials & carry our daily crosses as the most effective way to go through the narrow gate. Evangelist Matthew explains it further in chapter 25 verses 31 to 45 about the divine Judgment on the nations as following: "...Then the king will say to those on the right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry & you gave me food, I was thirsty & you gave me drink, a stranger & you welcomed me, naked & you clothed me, ill & you cared for me, in prison & you visited me.' ...And the King will say to them, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers/sisters of mine, you did it for me.'" So, if we do those kind & compassionate deeds for the poor & the lowly, we have attempted to go through the narrow gate in the eyes of the Lord.

Finally, Jesus wants to remind us that the narrow gate of Heaven would be closed at a certain time; & hence we must try to make it there on time. Otherwise, we will be left standing on the other side of the gate at closing time. Furthermore, we must carry our daily crosses & do all the kind & compassionate deeds that the Gospel passage of Matthew 25:31-45 mentioned above calls us to do in this life so that the Lord will be able to recognize us at the Gate of Heaven. If not, He will not acknowledge us & will tell us to go away for all the evil things that we might have done in this life. That would be a terrible shame & a big tragedy for us on the Last Day.

My dear brothers & sisters, Heaven is our true home. Salvation & eternal life is our true treasure. That is why many Christians have been concerned about them & would often ask, "Have you been saved?" This Sunday Jesus tells us that if we want to be saved & inherit eternal life in Heaven, we must go through the narrow gate & make lots of personal sacrifices it. Otherwise, we will not be able to make it to Heaven after this life.