

0822/10 WE DON'T ALWAYS LIKE NARROW...

(Why is it that we allow ourselves to be deluded into thinking that we can enter the kingdom but in our own way?)

“Strive to come in through the narrow gate. Many will try and will not be strong enough.” What does all that mean? Why is the gate narrow? Why will some not be strong enough? And what does any of this have to do with the very specific question that Jesus is asked: “are they few in number who will be saved?”

Sometimes the Scriptures make very clear sense to us as we sit and hear them read to us at Mass or when we just sit and read them ourselves. But to understand this gospel it is helpful to remember that the original language of the Scriptures is not English, it is Greek. To understand today's text it actually helps to go back to the Greek text. “Some will strive...” The Greek word here is AGONISTHE. We hear the root of our English word AGONY here. An AGON was a contest in ancient Greece, much like the Olympic Games that we associate in origin with Greece. Each competition would be called an AGON. AGONISTHE, then, means not only to try or to strive. It means “to enter the fray,” “to compete,” to “give it all you have.” “Some will give it all they have....”

“...and not be strong enough.” The Greek word here is ISKUO. It means “to be able to.” It means that “I can,” “I have the strength,” “I have the necessary resources.” So that sentence from today's gospel might read like this: “Some will give it all they have and find they don't have the necessary resources.” Another way we might say what Jesus says is, “Some will struggle and not have what it takes.” That is the question for us this morning. Do you have what it takes? Do I have what it takes? Do I have access to what it takes? Do you? And if we do have access, are we actually taking advantage of and accessing the resources that are available to us?

What's the narrow gate and why is it narrow? Well, if we are speaking about being saved then it's not really a question about what is the narrow gate but who is the narrow gate? The answer is Jesus. In John's gospel, Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd who leads and tends his sheep. Then Jesus calls himself the gate. The image is that of a shepherd leading his sheep into the protected area and then actually lying down right in the opening so that no one or nothing can enter the sheepfold except it goes through the shepherd. Jesus is the narrow gate and the gate is narrow because Jesus, and precisely Jesus, is the only way in. The characteristics of Christ are the characteristics of the way.

Jesus was a man of the truth. How are you doing with the truth in your life? How am I doing? Do I make the truth serve me and my purposes? Do I add to it or subtract from it to make things sound the way I want them to sound. Does the truth serve me or do I stand under the truth and allow it to call me into question with my pretensions and rationalizations? There is no other way in than the narrow way of the truth.

Jesus was compassionate. We like to think of ourselves as compassionate too but what is the extent of my compassion? Only to family or friends or neighbors? Does my compassion become so much a part of me that it is available to each person that I meet?

Jesus was forgiveness. “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” Who stands outside the reach of my forgiveness right now? Or outside the reach of your forgiveness? And whose forgiveness do I stand outside of?

Jesus spent himself for others. In other words, he served. Do I serve? Do I daily lay down my life for others be they family or coworkers or fellow parishioners or clients or neighbors? And how would I describe my relationship with the Lord? Is it really close? Do I truly love Christ? How much? More than....?

My friends, this is the only way into the kingdom, the only way to be saved. Our society says that there are a lot of different ways to be happy and be contented and feel good about ourselves. I have had people say to me that they pretty much go their own way and things seem to be going pretty good. “Things SEEM to be going pretty good.” Jesus doesn't deny that there are a lot of other ways available to people that look pretty good. There are major world religions that were founded by great teachers who offered a way of life. All those teachers have died. Jesus died too. But Jesus is not still in his grave. His tomb is empty. He has been raised. That resurrection is a validation and a vindication of HIS way of life, the narrow way.

Only Jesus has been raised never more to die. Only Jesus' way has overcome the grave. That's it. That's narrow. But that's it. And it truly is available to any person, anywhere in the world, north, south, east or west who desires to live his way and put faith in the Son of Man. And make no mistake about it. It

is a struggle and if we rely only on our own resources, our own talents, our own intelligence, our own savvy, our own experiences then we will find that those resources are not enough. What you and I have to ask ourselves is whether or not we are taking advantage of what is right in front of us or will be like those who tried but weren't strong enough?

We talk about being smart and how important it is to be smart. But there's smart and then there's really smart. When it comes to salvation and the narrow gate are we smart or are we really smart?