

Isn't today's Gospel a cheerful one? On the surface, it's like a "Debbie Downer" Gospel. There's talk of being cast out where the door will be locked, and our Lord doesn't know who we are to let us in. The other image given to us today is getting through a narrow gate to achieve salvation. Christ tells us many will try but will not be strong enough to get through it. If you cross reference this passage to the other two synoptic Gospels, St. Matthew's Gospel tells us only a few will make it through this gate.¹ It makes you wonder, who can be saved and how do I make sure I am strong enough to get through the narrow gate?

In St. Mark's Gospel, the context is given in the parable of the rich man. In this parable, the rich man asked Christ, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"² A question very similar to the one asked of Christ in today's Gospel. If you remember, the rich man goes away dejected when Christ tells him to gain real treasure in heaven, he must sell his possessions and follow him. Being he was rich man, he obviously had many possessions. Christ then explains how hard it is for a rich person to follow him who is attached to worldly things and desires.³ This is the lens through which I will focus my reflection on today.

¹ Matthew 7:14

² Mark 10:17

³ Mark 10:17-22

When I teach on the topic of what our Gospel speaks to us today about, I make the point to have people look inside themselves and ask this question, “what drives you?” What Drives You?! The answer to that question is who your god is! Is what drives you a piece of paper with the image of a dead president’s face on it, or the image of our Lord on the cross. An image of self-sacrificing love for God and for others. The answer to that question really determines if you are on the right path and will have the strength to get through the narrow gate. Attachments to worldly desires and temporal things takes us away from seeing and loving God and our neighbor’s need.

This is why our Lord says to the people he is speaking to that just because you ate and drank in his presence, doesn’t assure your salvation. It’s not good enough to come here once a week, and when we leave, have another life that is contrary to what we profess, and believe. Our faith cannot be limited to the inside the walls of this building! Our Catechism teaches us that, “...we cannot love God if we sin gravely against him, against our neighbor or against ourselves.”⁴ St. Cyril of Alexandria, a Church Father that lived in the late fourth to mid-fifth century, teaches on this passage, “Wide is the door, and broad the way

⁴ CCC 1033

*that brings down many to destruction. What are we to understand by its broadness? It means an unrestrained tendency toward carnal lust and a shameful and pleasure-loving life. It is luxurious feasts, parties, banquets and unrestricted inclinations to everything that is condemned by the law and displeasing to God.”*⁵ That is missing the narrow gate! Our challenge is to make it through this society of consumerism, materialism, and hedonistic lifestyles. This is what St. Cyril is warning us to avoid. However, we must put this in proper perspective. Is the Gospel telling us it is wrong to own nice things and have nice possessions? No! But we are expected to place them in their proper order. Again, I ask, what drives you? Who and/or what is your god?

Now, if the goal is to get through the narrow gate, which I assume it is since you are here, God didn't abandon us to wonder aimlessly throughout life trying to figure this out by ourselves. He gave us a map and spiritual tools to get through the narrow gate. First, and most importantly, he gave us the means to be saved by his sacrifice which opened the gates of heaven for all. Second, our Lord gave us the gift of sanctifying grace, which is manifested until the end of time, through the sacraments. For example, in the sacrament of Baptism, our souls are

⁵ Cyril of Alexandria

infused with the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity. The virtue of Faith gives us the ability to know God, love him and serve him. The virtue of Charity allows us to love our neighbor as God wants us to so we can see his image in everyone, even those who hate us, persecute us, plot our demise, the homeless, those in prison, juvenile detention, on death row, etc. etc.,. These infused virtues we receive in Baptism, means they are innate within us, they are part of who we are, our spiritual DNA if you will, and through the aid of sanctifying grace, counter the concupiscence innate in us from our fallen nature that draws us to worldly attachments and hedonistic desires. Finally, we have also been blessed with the deposit of faith given to us in Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition and the Magisterium and all of our liturgical celebrations, like today's.

Hopefully from this we see, to make it through the narrow gate is a choice, our choice and that's what determines how much strength you will have to make it through the gate. St. Paul tells us in his First Letter to Timothy, that God, "*...wills everyone to be saved...*"⁶ God wants us with him and is rooting for us. We each have to ask ourselves, do I want to be with him?

⁶ 1Timothy 2:4

Two weeks ago, Deacon Nick preached on a Gospel message from chapter twelve of St. Luke's gospel where it taught on being vigilant in our faith because we don't know the day or hour when the master comes. In his homily he discussed three options we can choose to live our lives by which were Options A, B and C. It somewhat reminded me of the old game show, "Let's Make a Deal," where the host Monty Hall gave you three curtains to pick from. Behind one curtain was the grand prize, behind another curtain was an okay prize, and the other, the booby prize.

Deacon Nick pointed out that, *"We can choose option "A" to be the Blessed servant who is following Jesus' command to love our neighbor and thereby find ourselves receiving the full benefits of the Kingdom of heaven. We can choose option "B" to be the fully informed servant who despite knowledge of his instruction actively works against Jesus' teaching and thereby find ourselves severely punished and placed with the unfaithful in hell. We can choose option "C" to be the fully informed servant who knows but chooses not to act on Jesus teaching and thereby find ourselves severely punished in purgatory."*⁷

⁷ Deacon Nick Thompson homily, *Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time*, August 11, 2019

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The big difference between the game show and the Gospel is in the game show you didn't know what was behind the curtains, you had to guess. In the spiritual world, there are no secrets. We don't have to guess how this works out! All of the curtains are open, and *you* decide which prize you want, the gate of everlasting life with God and the beatific vision, or in an eternal life absent of God. Our own patron Saint of this parish, St. Edward the Confessor, lived his life striving to get through the narrow gate. He was known to be a king that served his people and gave extensively to the poor in almsgiving. He was not a king that lorded over his people, like ancient kings usually did, but was a servant king like our Lord, like we are all called to be. He saw God's image in his people

In closing, hopefully through this reflection you picked up that the narrow gate is not some virtually impossible gate to get through that only a selected few with special knowledge know what to do like the Gnostics believed, or only one hundred forty-four thousand will make it through the gate like another faith believe. The gate is for all of us to pass through, what gives us the strength to make it through, are the choices

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we make in this life. Always remember: where your treasure is, there also
will be your heart be,⁸ and the god you serve. Therefore, choose wisely!
Amen

⁸ Luke 12:34