

In today's gospel, we encounter Jesus as he is beginning his final journey toward Jerusalem. Along the way, someone asked an interesting question – “Lord, will only a few be saved?” I'm curious as to the motivation for such a question.

- Was it simple curiosity?
- Perhaps it was from a sense of complacency, a belief that just being part of the crowd that followed Jesus was enough to ensure salvation.

Whatever the motivation, the response of Jesus should give us all pause. Jesus said we should **“strive to enter through the narrow gate....”** Rather than answering the question directly, Jesus responded with a challenge to the questioner and to us. Rather than worrying about who will be on the final list, we should focus on our own quality of discipleship. It is not enough to claim to follow Jesus, our faith requires some transformation; some effort on our part.

Over and over again in our gospels Jesus is clear that we cannot sit on the sidelines and give lip service. In today's gospel, Jesus said we must “strive” to enter the narrow gate. ***The Greek word used for “strive” is “agonizesthe” which is also where we get the word “agony”.*** In other words, effort on our part is required if we are going to fit through this gate, much like an athlete training for a competition. An athlete has to be disciplined and dedicated to be successful. You don't wake up one morning and decide to run a marathon. It takes practice and dedication, so too with faith. Jesus is not interested in the uniform we wear or the words we speak. Jesus is looking for effort and dedication on our part.

How do we prepare to enter through this narrow gate?

- We start by having a relationship with the Almighty. We start the day by giving thanks to God and asking for the grace to live our faith each and every day.
- We end the day by again giving thanks, asking for forgiveness for our faults, and expressing our love.
- We talk to God throughout the day, not just when we see the flashing red lights in the rearview mirror or when we are in crisis.
- We come to mass on Sunday, we feast at this table and listen to God's Word, we join in fellowship with our fellow parishioners.

In other words, we not only make room for God in our lives, but we actually make God a priority. It is too easy to get caught up in the busyness of life that we forget about God or unintentionally put God on the backburner.

Having a relationship with God is the first step because it makes living our faith so much easier. The second step is truly believing that we are a beloved child of God. God's love for us is without question. We are created in God's image and likeness and God created us in love to love and to be loved. Do you see the theme? Love! Love must be our motivation – love for God, love for others, and love for ourselves. If we don't love ourselves, how can we love God and others?

Do you remember the adage "Practice makes perfect"? We live our discipleship one day at a time trying to let love be our motivation. We strive to be a person of love each and every day. When an athlete loses a race or competition, they try harder the next time, they stay focused. That is all that Jesus is asking of us, to put effort into our faith. Will we ever be perfect? No, but when we fall into the trap of sin, when we fall short of our goal, we get back up and try again, and again, and again, as many times as necessary. Jesus never said we

have to become perfect. Jesus said we must **strive** to enter the narrow gate, to work at it, to practice, to want it. St. Paul, in our second reading today, reminds us to expect pain if we are going to run the race, but not to be disheartened. The prize is worth all the effort.

The good news for us is that the narrow gate is at least as wide as the loving arms of Christ outstretched on the cross. My friends, Jesus showed us how to live our faith so that we can easily walk right through that narrow gate and that is by being people of love and integrity. The path that leads to the narrow gate can be demanding, because it is not always easy to respond with love when we are met with a fist, to respond with compassion when we are met with hostility, or to stay focused when we are tempted to venture off and wander away from God's loving embrace. We can fit through the narrow gate with God's help by striving to live out the gospel values of love, mercy, and forgiveness. Our gospel passage today ended with the words: ***“And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God.”*** Let us pray that God give us the grace to shed the baggage we carry so that we can fit through the narrow gate no matter from what direction we travel.