

GOSPEL

LUKE 13:22-30

Through towns and villages Jesus went teaching, making his way to Jerusalem. Someone said to him, ‘Sir, will there be only a few saved?’ He said to them, ‘Try your best to enter by the narrow door, because, I tell you, many will try to enter and will not succeed.

‘Once the master of the house has got up and locked the door, you may find yourself knocking on the door, saying, “Lord, open to us” but he will answer, “I do not know where you come from.” Then you will find yourself saying, “We once ate and drank in your company; you taught in our streets” but he will reply, “I do not know where you come from. Away from me, all you wicked men!”

‘Then there will be weeping and grinding of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves turned outside. And men from the east and west, from north and south, will come to take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.

‘Yes, there are those now last who will be first, and those now first who will be last.’

The Gospel of the Lord.

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

Today’s Gospel passage presents Jesus teaching in towns and villages, on his way to Jerusalem where he knows he will die on the Cross for the salvation of us all. In this context, a man asks a question, who addresses him saying: “Lord, will those who are saved be few?”. The question had been a source of debate at that time — how many will be saved, how many not ... — and there were several ways to interpret Scriptures on the issue, depending on the texts chosen. Jesus, however, reverses the question — which stresses quantity, that is: “are they few?...” — and instead places the question in the context of responsibility, inviting us to make good use of the present. Indeed, he says: “Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able”.

With these words, Jesus makes it clear that it is not a matter of numbers, there is

no “limited number” in Paradise! Rather, it is a case of taking the right way from now, and this right way is for everyone, but it is narrow. This is the problem. Jesus does not want to give us false hopes by saying: “Yes, do not worry, it is easy, there is a beautiful highway with a large gate at the end”. He does not say this. He tells us things as they truly are: the doorway is narrow. In what sense? In the sense that, in order to save oneself, one has to love God and neighbour, and this is uncomfortable! It is a “narrow doorway” because it is demanding. Love is always demanding. It requires commitment, indeed, “effort”, that is, a determined and persevering willingness to live according to the Gospel. Saint Paul calls it “the good fight of the faith” (1 Tim 6:12). It takes a daily, all-day effort to love God and neighbour.

And in order to explain himself better, Jesus tells a parable. There is a householder who represents the Lord. His house symbolizes eternal life, thus salvation. And here the image of the door returns. Jesus says: “When once the householder has risen up and shut the door, you will begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying: ‘Lord, open to us’. He will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from’”. These people will then attempt to claim his acquaintance, reminding the householder: “I ate and drank with you ... I listened to your advice, to your public teaching ...”; “I was there when you held that talk ...”. But the Lord will repeat that he does not know them and he calls them “workers of iniquity”. Here is the problem! The Lord will not recognize us for our claims — “But look, Lord, I used to belong to that association, I was friends with this Monsignor, this cardinal, this priest ...”. No, claims do not count, they do not count. The Lord will recognize us only for our humble life and a good life, a life of faith that resulted in good works.

And for us Christians, this means that we are called to establish a true communion with Jesus, praying, going to Church, drawing near to the Sacraments and nourishing ourselves of his Word. This keeps us in the faith, nourishes our hope, rekindles our charity. And thus, with God’s grace, we

can and must live our lives for the good of our brothers and sisters, fighting against every kind of evil and injustice.

May the Virgin Mary help us in this. She went through the narrow door that is Jesus. She welcomed him with all her heart and she followed him every day of her life, even when she did not understand, even when a sword pierced her soul. This is why we invoke her as “Mary Gate of Heaven”, a gate that traces the form of Jesus precisely: the door to God’s heart, a demanding heart, but one that is open to us all.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Pope Francis reminds us in his reflection that Jesus also in scripture refers to himself as - ‘the door’. How does this help you understand and respond to this Gospel reading?
- What are the things we have inside of us that prevent us from entering the narrow door?
- How might you respond to the urgency of the words of Jesus in this Gospel passage?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the ‘Glory Be’ or similar prayer.