

In the ✠ name of Jesus. Amen.

Last Sunday, Jesus taught us that He came not to bring peace on earth but division. Perhaps this teaching was on the people's minds as in today's lesson Jesus continues "*on his way*" "*journeying toward Jerusalem,*" going "*through towns and villages, teaching*" the people, for someone asked Jesus the question, "*Lord, will those who are saved be few?*"

Jesus does answer the question, though indirectly: "*many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.*" The implication is that "*Yes, they will be few*" for Jesus had taught on another occasion, in the Sermon on the Mount, that "*the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*" Here Jesus says it a bit differently, in the negative: "*many ... will not be able [to enter].*"

Now, it's a rather abstract question: "*will those who are saved be few?*" I'm sure some people today really are wondering about that person's salvation who lives in the bowels of the Amazon rainforest who hasn't heard about Jesus, but for most people, I think, the real motivation for this question is more concrete: "will I be saved?" And maybe even, "Why should I be saved, and not someone else?"

Jesus recognizes this and does not let His answer wallow in the abstraction concerning all those other folks out there somewhere. He directs His answer to the inquirers: YOU ALL, "*Strive to enter through the narrow door.*" There is truly only one way of salvation, and that way is narrow, Jesus says. Other paths may be easy, other doors may be wide, but those lead only to destruction (Matt. 7), not salvation. The door into the Father's house is narrow.

So, the question for us today is not about the salvation of everyone else out there. It's about our own salvation, or more specifically your salvation. Will you be saved? Will you be among the few?

Certainly the gate to destruction is wide and the way is easy, as Jesus taught. It is easy to just indulge yourself, your every whim. It's the world's message: "Go ahead and do it, if you want. Have it your way; do it your way. Have it now; no wait; no denying oneself; no deferred satisfaction." It's the message of our modern times, this covetousness, this pursuit of happiness in wealth and prosperity, which is, at its root, corrupt, leading us toward the wide gate, putting us on the easy path to destruction. Repent! For that's what Jesus means when He says, "Strive." He's not telling us to depend on our works to enter the kingdom. He's telling us to struggle against sin as sons of God, and when we fail to repent. He's calling us to the agonizing denial of ourselves, taking up our cross and following Him. He's telling us to drown our Old Adam in daily contrition and repentance, and to depend solely on God's all-sufficient grace.

Don't misunderstand, it's not that wealth and prosperity are evils of themselves. But as the rich young man discovered, his covetousness put Him on the easy path and led him to hang his head and walk away from the One who is narrow Door in the flesh, and who taught His disciples: *"it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."* And as St. Paul reminds us, it's through this craving for money and riches *"that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs."*

So, will you be among the few? If not, it's because of your own most grievous fault, for it's not as if God had no desire for your repentance and salvation. Remember St. Paul's affirmation that God *"desires all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth."* St. Peter affirms that the Lord *"is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."* Also through the prophet Ezekiel the Lord proclaims that He takes *"no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but [desires] that the wicked turn from his way and live."*

Moreover, when God sent His only-begotten Son down from His side to take on our flesh and to be lifted up on the tree of the cross, He did it as an expression of that great love and desire to save the world, all men. *"For God did not send his Son into THE WORLD to condemn THE WORLD, but in order that THE WORLD might be saved through him."* Truly, this is how God loved the whole world, by sending His own Son as the atoning sacrifice, not just for persons here and there in the world, not just for a few chosen ones, but for everyone in THE WHOLE WORLD (1 Jn 2:2). This is called God's universal grace, God in Christ *"reconciling THE WORLD to himself, not counting their trespasses against them."*

Now Pastor Harrison is fond of saying, *"If you're not a sinner, then Christ isn't for you."* He's not suggesting, in fact, that you're not a sinner. Rather, He is exposing the lie that deceives people into thinking they are without sin and have no need for a Savior. But you know best your sins, and I pray that therefore, you rejoice, not in your sins, but in your Savior, for you know that Christ did come for you, for you know this trustworthy saying: *"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."* More than that, Scripture just won't let you off the hook saying you have no sin, for *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* But again, rejoice, for St. Paul continues that ALL *"are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood."*

But besides that, Scripture also bears witness to the fact that the way we gain access to this *"grace in which we stand"* is through faith in Christ Jesus that comes by God's grace. This is the narrow door that Jesus was talking about in our Gospel.

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”* And all *“are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ... to be received by faith.”* This faith is also gift that comes through the word of Christ, the word of cross and resurrection, the message of reconciliation, the preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus’ name. This is the grace alone part of our salvation — salvation through the narrow door — by grace through faith.

So, will you be among the few? God desires all to be saved and has made sure that the sins of the world have been atoned for. But God is also not indifferent to how that grace is received. Thus He sent His Son Jesus to be that narrow door. Jesus said, *“I am the door of the sheep. ... If anyone enters by me, he will be saved ...”* And he will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

So be gone, with the wide doors and easy paths of indifference to Jesus’ word—that is no way of salvation. Be gone with those who claim many ways to God, or self-chosen ways to God, or that they are saved as an act of their own will or their own works. God will not allow His glory to be given to another, and especially not to sinful creatures. Many may want to enter, but many will be locked out because they did not go through the Narrow Door that is Christ. And they will hear the terrifying words, *“I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!”* And they will begin an eternity of *“weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

Will you be among the few? You will when you mortify your own flesh and cling to the crucified and risen flesh of Christ. That is when you enter by Christ, the Narrow Door. And though there will be few, there will be with you *“people ... from east and west, and from north and south,”* *“Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free,”* all who are in Christ Jesus and enter through Him, all reclining *“at table in the kingdom of God.”*

Which is why we sing with the Psalmist today, *“Praise the LORD, ALL nations! Extol him, ALL peoples! For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!”*

In the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.