

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Someone asks Jesus an important question in today's Gospel: "**Lord, will only a few people be saved?**" (Luke 13:23). Most people in today's culture hear Jesus' response as, "Many will enter, but only a few will be lost." This is actually the exact opposite of what Jesus says. He says,

Strive to enter through the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough. (Luke 13:24)

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says something similar:

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few. (Matthew 7:13-14)

At the heart of Jesus' message is that we have to work to get to heaven.

Now just to clarify – it is NOT that we *earn* heaven. We can do nothing to *earn* Heaven. By our sin, we had broken off our relationship with God. God Himself opens the gates of Heaven to us so that we can enter in. So, to be clear, it is by the passion (suffering), cross, and resurrection of Jesus that we are able to enter into Heaven.

That being said, our lives, our choices we make, are choices to enter through the narrow door ... or not. Our basic tendency is for the "not" choice. Why is that? It is because of Original Sin. You remember the Original Sin – when Adam and Eve chose to reject the Fatherhood of God by grasping at the forbidden fruit, and then refusing to take responsibility for their sin. This sin broke the universe, so to speak. Now the close relationships we had with God, with each other, within ourselves, and with nature are now askew, and we are not at peace. Our desires have been messed up, and now, instead of reaching for the infinite (God), we reach to fill our emptiness with finite things (relationships, pleasure, power, selfishness, etc.). This traditionally has been called *concupiscence*.

Baptism washes Original Sin away, but the effects of Original Sin – concupiscence – remains. As such, we still desire the wrong things – we still have the basic tendency to choose immediate gratification instead of the eternal love of God. I think this is why Jesus says that many try to enter the narrow door but are not strong enough: they – we – don't say "no" to our disordered desires, and so we end up saying "no" to God. This is why we fast, especially during Lent – so that we can build up our self-control, saying "no" even to good things, so that we can have the strength to say "yes" to God. Our desires, for instance, for cookies may overwhelm our knowledge that too many cookies are bad for our health. So, we give up cookies for Lent – not because cookies are bad, but because our desire for cookies are disordered and need to be held in check. In other words, if we had a proper desire for cookies, we would be able to eat one or two, enjoy them tremendously, giving thanks to God for the gift of our taste buds ... and not eat the whole container of cookies!

Apply this to every area of our lives – whether it be food, the sexual embrace, our use of entertainment, work, money, power, or anything else. We need to strive to say "yes" to God, which means curbing the "runaway" desires that turn inward on ourselves.

So how do we enter the narrow door? First, *we need to ask God for help*. Remember that we are weaker than we like to think. And that's okay. The problem is not that we are weak, but that we refuse God's help. Pray. Ask God for the grace to re-order the disorder in ourselves. Second, take stock of your life. You know the areas that are "out of whack" ... if you don't, just ask the people with which you live – I'm sure they'll be glad to tell you. Look at these desires that are out of proper order, and think about one small step you can make today to reorder one desire within yourself. Ask God for clarity with that, and let Him lead you. Each small step helps us on the journey.

The choice to want to follow Christ is a BIG STEP toward making it through the narrow door... and Jesus *wants* us to go through. May we find in Him the strength to overcome ourselves and receive the saving power of God.