

HOM 21st Sunday 2022 C August 21

Today's Scripture readings give us a vitally important 4-part lesson about salvation. Beginning with the Gospel, each of the other readings then expands on its meaning.

In that Gospel reading, Jesus is asked if only a few people will be saved, and His answer is not direct but indirect. He says: *"Strive to enter through the narrow gate."* In effect Jesus is saying: *Whether only a few or many or even all of the willing are saved is, to some extent, up to you. If you strive to enter through the Narrow Gate you will enter into Heaven and be saved and will help others to enter into Heaven through the Narrow Gate and be saved.*

Now, the narrow gate is Jesus Himself, Crucified and Risen, Who bluntly said in John's Gospel, Chapter 10: "I AM THE GATE. WHOEVER ENTERS THROUGH ME WILL BE SAVED..." (9). In today's Gospel Acclamation we also heard Jesus declare: "I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE; NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER, EXCEPT THROUGH ME. And He adds this several verses after identifying Himself as the Gate (John 10:14-15): "I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD...AND I WILL LAY DOWN MY LIFE FOR MY SHEEP." (14-15) So, Jesus is the Narrow Gate to Heaven. He is the only WAY to the Father, and He lays down His life for the sheep to protect them from the wolf – the Evil One – and to take them with Himself to the green pastures of Heaven.

Putting this all together, we can see that entering through the Narrow Gate means being one with Jesus in His loving obedience to the Father 's will unto the Cross and Resurrection. It means we are to join in Jesus' saving oblation for the life of the world, the salvation of all the willing. This is the fulfillment of Jesus' New Commandment of Love – to love one another as He has loved us. If we do this, we will enter through the Narrow Gate and be saved and we will help to save others. We will help all the willing to enter through the Narrow Gate.

Brothers and sisters, Eucharistic Self-Offering is our **statement of intention** to enter through the Narrow Gate. It is our deliberate, free, and total consent to join in Jesus' saving oblation, and with Heaven's help, to live this out. This is where our second reading comes in to expand our understanding of what this means. It helps us to see that if we offer ourselves to and with Jesus to the Father unto the Cross of obedience and love for the salvation of the willing, we are going to be conformed to Jesus. And just as the Father perfected His Only-Begotten Son by the suffering He endured for us as Son of Man, so it will be for us, *"for whom the Lord loves, He disciplines; He scourges every son He acknowledges"* as we heard in our second reading. And if we are one with Jesus, then we will be scourged with Him in order to be perfected with Him and conformed to Him.

So, if we offer ourselves with Jesus for the sanctification and salvation of others, beginning with ourselves, the Cross will certainly be put upon us. When this happens, the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews tells us today: *"Endure your trials as 'discipline'; God treats you as sons (and we may add daughters in Christ)....strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees."* In other words, see it as something good. Don't ask WHY ME? We know why, because we want to enter through the Narrow Gate. We want to be one with Jesus and conformed to Him in His saving oblation for the life of the world. We want all the willing to be saved beginning with our family and friends. That's why we are going to suffer with Jesus voluntarily, asking the help of the Blessed Mother -- who did this more than anyone else --and asking the help of St. Joseph, too. Without this heavenly help we will not be strong enough to do this, as Jesus said the Gospel reading.

And if we don't offer ourselves this way, we will fall short of our goal. We will be stopped at the threshold of heaven. We will say to Jesus, *"We ate in your company and you taught in our streets."* In other words, *we came to Mass and listened to the Word of God, and we partook of your Body and Blood*

in Holy Communion. But Jesus will say to us, *You did not offer yourself to Me; You did not join in my oblation to the Father for the salvation of the willing. I do not know where you are from.*” Nor will the Father recognize us as people in His Son.

If we learn to offer ourselves to and with Jesus, however, we will enter through the Narrow Gate and be warmly welcomed into the Father’s House. And even if we offer ourselves *first and foremost* for the sanctification and salvation of those we hold dear, we can also, at the same time, offer ourselves for countless others, and communicate to them **in equal measure** the grace of the Holy Spirit that we communicate to loved ones. The effect of this is described in our first reading. It is as though, by doing this, we become evangelists and missionaries – “fugitives” who are sent and are fleeing to people all over the world. When we make our Eucharistic Self-Offering for everybody we know and for everyone the Lord wants us to include in our self-offering -- and strive to live this out -- we communicate to them the saving grace of the Holy Spirit even though we may be homebodies and never visit them in person or see them on a cell phone. Like St. Terese of Lisieux, the Little Flower, who never left the Carmelite cloister, we will help to save souls from within the confines of our daily lives.

And by doing this, as we hear in that first reading, we are also making of *the willing* for whom we offer ourselves **an offering to the Lord**. In other words, the grace we communicate to them enables them to join in Jesus’ saving oblation with us. They will be drawn to Jesus in Holy Communion and through their Eucharistic Self-Offering for the life of the world, through the Narrow Gate. Not only will they be exercising their Baptismal priesthood in this way, some who are called will be ordained as priests, according to the Word of God in the first reading: *“Some of these I will take as priests and Levites, says the Lord.”*

This brings us to the Responsorial Psalm, and especially the refrain *“Go out, go out to all the world and tell the good news.”* The good news is that **all the willing** CAN be saved, with our help and their cooperation with God’s grace...with our Self-Offering in oneness with Jesus for them, and their self-offering with Jesus. And so, at every opportunity, we also have to teach others how to practice Eucharistic-Self-Offering. We have to promote it. One of the Communion antiphons for today expresses the result of this: *“The earth is replete with the fruit of your work, O Lord; you bring forth bread from the earth and wine to cheer the heart.”*

The bread and wine here are the Eucharistic Bread and Wine Jesus gives us for the consummate oneness of all the willing with Himself in His eternal Self-Offering to the Father in praise and thanksgiving and loving obedience. What unending gladness the Lord is offering us to replace all the sadness of this life brought about by sin, and as a reward for bearing the Cross of Eucharistic Self-Offering.

If you want to share in this and help others to do so, just pray these words silently and sincerely with every Holy Communion and strive to live them out -- i.e., to enter through the Narrow Gate -- in-between:
I AM ALL YOURS O MOST LOVING JESUS THROUGH MARY, YOUR MOTHER, WITH THE HELP OF ST. JOSEPH.