

Thinking back on my undergraduate studies at St. John's University, I was reminded of one of the many excellent philosophy professors that taught there. One of the many pieces of wisdom that she gave her students was, "I will go with you to the gates of hell, but I will not enter in". To enter the gates of hell is the choosing of evil, the rejection of doing God's will in one's life. It is the turning away from the constant love that God extends to us throughout our life. To enter the gates of hell is forever, there is no getting out, no second chance, no turning back. It is the greatest pain and suffering that we can experience, it is the absence of God. In our Gospel today, Jesus is asked the question, "Lord, will only a few people be saved?" He answered them, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough."

Jesus reminds us that it is not enough for us to say that we knew of Him or about Him to be saved. If we don't enter through the narrow gate, we may jeopardize our salvation. He warns us in this Gospel, "Then you will stand outside knocking and saying, 'Lord, open the door for us.' He will say in reply, 'I do not know where you are from...Depart from me, all you evildoers!'"

The Gospel invites us to seek out the narrow gate and discover how we can enter through it. A narrow gate limits us in what we can take along as we go through it. The narrow gate reminds us the importance of letting go of the things of the world and not desiring and accumulating possessions. We cannot take them with us through the narrow gate; possessions keep us from entering through the passageway that leads to eternal life. Each year in seminary I remember watching the graduating seminarians clean out their rooms after four or five years of formation and some had

to hire a truck because they accumulated so many material things. God wants us to let go of the things of the world because they keep us from the seeking the things of heaven.

The narrow gate also emphasizes the need for us to be small or little to pass through, it points to the virtue of humility. The entrance way that leads to the Church of the Nativity in the Holy Land (the place of Jesus' birth) has a very small opening. One must be very small or bow down to enter through. It is a reminder of the importance for us to always walk humbly with our God. When we are filled with self and pride, we elbow God out of our lives. We fail to notice God's presence in our lives and often fail to recognize the needs of others. This is the wide gate that leads to destruction. In John's Gospel Jesus tells us that He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. He also says, "I am the gate for the sheep." It is through Him, and with Him, and in Him that we are saved. It is by following Jesus and doing the will of our Heavenly Father that we enter through the narrow gate that leads to salvation. It is not enough to say that we know Him. We must belong to Him and share our lives with Him through a life of prayer and by following His commandments and the teachings of His Church. We must be children of the Father otherwise He might say, "I do not know where you are from" and we could be locked out of the kingdom of heaven forever.

Through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the Priest is configured to Christ and shares in His role as High Priest. The Priest stands in the person of Christ and so he too is a gate, a narrow gate by which we can find our way home. The Priest helps us through the gift of the Sacraments to configure our lives to Christ. He teaches us the way through the narrow gate and warns us of the deadly dangers of the wide gate that leads to destruction. Pray for vocations to the Priesthood so that we will have courageous and holy Priests to lead us through the narrow gate that leads to paradise.