

“Lord, will only a few people be saved?”

The answer to this question has been sought after for many, many years. And it always seems to carry with it an attached degree of anxiety, as in: “Lord, will I be saved? Will I be among those in heaven?”

But, as urgent as this question is, Jesus’ response in today’s Gospel is somewhat confusing. It’s almost as if someone asked him about the weather in Missouri in mid-August and he responded, “I think it might snow. . .”

In case you missed it, Jesus’ response to the question about who will be saved was: “strive to enter through the narrow gate.” A narrow gate – where did that come from – and what is this a gate to? – No clear answer is given.

So the only thing we can do is try to unpack what’s really going on here and hope this helps us understand better why St. Luke included this interaction in his Gospel. . .

Now remember, central to Luke’s message is the idea that *everyone* is invited to participate in the journey of dying to our egotistical self and rising to a life of generosity and mercy.

*Everyone* is invited to follow after Jesus and to walk in his way – to live life as he taught us – not as we would want it.

This is what Jesus means by the “narrow gate”. He calls it this because it opens onto a path that probably would not be our first choice -- because following after Jesus always requires some sacrifice on our part. . .

So we choose NOT to squeeze through the narrow gate – because we would rather coast through a bigger one: one of self-service, not other-service; the gate of ease and comfort, not hardship; the gate of power and influence, rather than of surrender and sacrifice.

And that’s why Jesus calls it narrow --- because few of us would naturally choose it.

To put it another way – Jesus invites us into an inverted world – one that seems turned upside down – because it is so counter-cultural.

In this inverted world—we are infinitely loved by a God who pursues us and welcomes us into an intimate relationship distinguished by such values as generosity, service, mercy, and compassion.

In this inverted world – we are invited to die to ourselves in order to rise to new life --- where we live in solidarity, not individualism. Where we live in community, and not alone. Where we share what we have instead of grabbing for all we can get. Where we ask, how can I help – instead of asking what’s in this for me.

But our natural response to all this is to say that it is too hard, too difficult, too demanding.

Jesus’ response to our natural reaction to living in this counter-cultural, inverted world is captured in the first word he uses to answer the man’s original question of how many will be saved: STRIVE.

In the original Greek – the word means “engaging in an intense struggle and effort against great opposition”. It is similar to a word describing a passionate agony -->>>>>

Such as Jesus endured in the Garden of Gethsemane. A word a football coach might use in a pre-game pep-talk when he wants the team to go out and do their best:

Strive. Struggle. Endeavor. Attempt.

STRIVE to do the right thing – even if no one around you is doing it.

STRUGGLE against the temptation to build bigger barns to store your wealth instead of helping the poor.

ENDEAVOR to humble yourself in order to be exalted.

ATTEMPT to seek first the kingdom of God, then everything else will be given to you.

To enter through the narrow gate is to follow Jesus, to love what Jesus loved, and to live like Jesus lived.

To enter through the narrow gate we must

Strive, Struggle, Endeavor, and Attempt –

And since all of us had the opportunity to answer **Amen** to this prayer and the beginning of Mass:

“Help us to love what you command and to desire what you promise, that amid the uncertainties of this world, our hearts may be fixed on that place where true happiness is found”

– I will see you at the gate!