

**Twenty-first Sunday C: Luke 13: 22-30 (L) 10**

**THEME: STRIVE TO ENTER HEAVEN THROUGH THE NARROW GATE**

**OBJECTIVE: THAT WE MAY ACCEPT GOD'S DISCIPLINE**

In today's gospel text, someone asks Jesus: "Lord, will only a few people be saved?" (Lk 13:23). This question is prompted by the fact that some of the Jews are arguing that only a few people will be saved. While others assert that all people will be saved.

The question is still relevant even today, because some Churches teach "Christianity Made Simple" saying: "Everybody will be saved, because Christ died for all." The Catholic Church, which refused to water down Christ's words, still teaches that one has to strive to enter heaven through the narrow gate.

What does "entering through the narrow gate" mean? Literally, it implies losing weight. And that necessitates some fasting, doing exercises, and having self control. Biblically it means losing one's pride, while gaining humility, becoming childlike, being ready to accept God's discipline, even when it means carrying the cross.

It connotes obeying God's commandments, controlling one's desires, being honest, charitable, loving, open, teachable, free from prejudice, ready to change according to God's will.

It means total trust in God, and having confidence in the essential goodness of people and being ready to forgive and forget. It involves perseverance in one's faith, despite persecutions.

These are the qualities by which Christ is going to recognize us; not only by the name Christian or the frequenting of Masses. One may argue with Christ saying: Lord, I used to receive Holy Communion. But if one did not put communion into practice in the community, Jesus is likely to say: "I do not know you." St. James in 2:17, concludes thus: "Faith without works, is dead." So, those who say: "Only faith saves" are misleading people. Paul, in Rom 3, said it to correct those who were demanding circumcision as a condition for becoming a Christian.

Some of the Israelites, who used to brag about their holiness, thinking that only they would be saved, dropped their prejudice during their exile in Babylon, when they saw people behaving better than they.

Consequently, Isaiah predicted, as we have heard during the first reading: "Thus says the Lord, I know their works and their thoughts, and I come to gather nations of every language; they shall come and see my glory." (Is 66:18). So, the Lord will know His people fit for heaven by their works and thoughts.

Consequently, my advice to you is that, when you come to the heavenly door, do not introduce yourself as a Christian by name. Say: I am the good Samaritan so and so, who helped so and so, or who helped you Jesus when you were in need. Then St. Peter will immediately stamp your papers with the Visa necessary for heaven.

Besides that, remember the message of the second reading (Heb 12:5-13): "Do not disdain the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when reproved by Him; for whom the Lord loves He disciplines; he scourges every son he acknowledges." Endure your trials as discipline". God treats us as sons and daughters. What son is there whom the father does not discipline? At the time, all discipline seems a cause not for Joy but for pain, yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it."

That is another way God makes us fit to enter through the narrow door. Actually, discipline is the narrow door. If you have been wondering why God does not take away your misery and misfortunes, now you know why. If a child gets injured during the process of learning how to walk, do you stop him from walking?

God does not inflict people with suffering. It is the devil that does so. God does not take pleasure in people's suffering; but He may allow them to go through it to control their pride.

Abraham entered heaven after passing several tests, like the request to sacrifice his son (Gn. 22). Prophets, like Jeremiah had to pass tests of persecution. Many other people from all nations did the same.

Christ Himself re-entered heaven through the narrow gate, by his crucifixion, suffering and death. This is what we are celebrating in the Holy Eucharist. As we receive His Body and Blood that came from His discipline, he challenges us saying: "You too, if you want to enjoy the heavenly banquet, as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, prophets and I are doing, accept God's discipline."