

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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In today's gospel lesson, someone asks Jesus point blank, "Lord, will those who are saved be *few*," which is the *deepest* concern of *our* hearts as well. Jesus answers, "*Strive* to enter through the *narrow* door; for *many*, I tell you, will *seek* to enter and will *not* be *able*."

- ❖ Now, to hear that *many* who *think* they're *in* will be shut *out* can be *extremely* unsettling, because of course, it forces us to wonder, "Could that be *me*?"
- ❖ And that's *exactly* the right *question*, because in all honesty, *yes*, it *could* be – but it doesn't *have* to be.

Let's start with what went wrong here.

- ❖ Jesus summarizes the whole law and all the prophets by telling us to love God with *everything* we *are* and *everything* we *have*, and to love our *neighbors* as *ourselves*.
- ❖ So our whole *purpose* is *relationship*; *first* with *God* and then, *through* God, with our *neighbors*.
- ❖ Now, we can *see* that those who get shut out have *some* sense of that; that's why they *think* that they're *in*.
- ❖ Right away they point to a *connection*.

They say, "We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets," which is kind of like saying, "We had the most amazing street tacos while your band was playing at CityFest."

Clearly that's *not* the kind of *relationship* Jesus is looking for.

- ❖ He doesn't want to teach in your streets – he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.
- ❖ He wants us come and follow him, to keep his commandments and abide in his love.

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Jesus doesn't want you to just eat and drink in his presence – he is the Bread of Life.

- ❖ He tells us that those who eat his flesh and drink his blood abide in him, and he in them.
- ❖ He invites us to take him and make him a part of us, to thirst for him the way he thirsts for us.

What we *really* need to see, though, is that they don't *have* a relationship with Jesus because they don't *want* one.

- ❖ Just look at how the whole parable *starts*: “When once the householder has *risen* up and *shut* the door, you will begin to stand outside and to knock at the door...”
 - You can't *shut* a door that's already *closed*, and you can't *rise up* if you're *guarding* the door.
- ❖ So it's as if the householder has just been *sitting* inside, *waiting* to receive people through the *open* door, which means if you're *not* in, it's because you *weren't* trying to *enter*.
- ❖ And Jesus says that they don't even *begin* to stand outside and knock *until* the door is *shut*.

So to return our *original* question, “Could *that* be *me*? Could *I* be shut out of the kingdom of God?”, I think the *answer* is, “It's up to *you*.”

- ❖ Paul writes to Timothy, that God *desires* that we *all* be saved and come to know the truth.
- ❖ We *have* to strive and struggle because the door is *narrow*, but it's *open*.
- ❖ The question is, “Do we *want* to go through it?” If so, here are some ways to do it.

I think the *big* thing to keep in mind is the *kind* of relationship Jesus describes.

- ❖ By virtue of our *baptism* we are members of his *own body*, and that's not *symbolic* or *poetic*, it's *literal*.
- ❖ Jesus has *spiritually* united himself to us so that he is as *present* to our *every* moment as our *hands* and *feet*, our *lungs* and our *heart*.
- ❖ So what we *really* need to be concerned with is *growing* in our *awareness* of that reality and living *into* it.

You can do that by taking time to pray *every day*, asking Jesus to make you *aware* of his *presence* and then *giving* him the *opportunity*.

- ❖ It might *help* to think of the *gaze* of Jesus, like in his reaction to the rich young ruler, that "*looking* at him, he *loved* him."
- ❖ Or imagine yourself in the place of *John*, the Beloved Disciple, at the Last Supper; resting *your* head on Jesus' chest and listening to *his* heart beat for *you*.
- ❖ That might seem strange or even *uncomfortable*, but don't be *afraid* to get close to *Jesus*.
- ❖ He wants you to *know* that He is a *real, living*, divine person and that he wants *you* to share the *deepest possible* friendship with *him*.

This is important because it's our *friendship* with Jesus that will *encourage* us to *keep* striving, instead of getting *careless* about our relationship.

- ❖ We'll avoid *sin* and the things that lead us *to* it because what wounds *Jesus* will *wound* us.
- ❖ When we're *prompted* by the Holy Spirit to *do* something, we'll respond *generously* because we *love* Jesus and it makes him *happy*.
- ❖ When we *stumble* and *fall*, we'll be *quick* to *admit* our sin and *repent* because we *know* how much He *loves* us and we'll want to make things *right*.

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Again, we *do* have to *strive* and *struggle* because *real love* is not *easy*.

- ❖ But *Jesus* is *the* happiness and love that is *deepest* desire of *every* human heart, and the door to him *is narrow*, but *it's open*.
- ❖ And *so*, as Jesus says at the *end* of today's gospel lesson, they will come to him from *east* and *west*, and from *north* and *south*, to sit with him at table in kingdom of God.
- ❖ Could *that* be you? *Yes*, it *could* be, so *keep striving*.