

“Strive to Enter Through the Narrow Gate”

21<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time [C]

Is 66:18-21; Ps 117:1-2; Heb 12:5-7, 11-13; Jn 14:6; Lk 13:22-30

As the Rio Summer Olympics draw to a close this evening...

- Reading today's Gospel it strikes me that the question posed to Jesus:
  - o “*Will only a few people be saved?*”
- could be related to the Olympic games by asking:
  - o Will only a few people receive a gold medal..?

The obvious answer to our Olympics question is

- Yes (of course!) only a few people ever receive the gold medal...

And while Jesus did not directly answer *Yes* or *No*

- o as to whether only a few would be saved
  - He went deeper, as always, to challenge us:
  - “*Strive to enter by the narrow gate...*” he says
    - o “*for many will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough...*”
  - Strive for gold... for many will attempt to win
    - o but will not be strong enough...

Now while most people realistically will never make it to the Olympics

- much less be in contention for a gold medal,
- Praise God: ALL of us have the potential of seeing Heaven

Yet, despite that grand potential

- o Jesus warns us today that MANY will not make it...

Why not? Jesus says, many simply “*will not be strong enough*”

- In Matt 7:13, Jesus explains it this way:
- “*Strive to enter thru the narrow gate. For wide is the way, broad is the road, that leads to destruction...*
  - o *and MANY will go thru that gate...*”

It's a cautionary statement from Jesus, but as we read the news and

- observe the world around us, indeed it's easy to see
- There is no shortage of people marching
  - right down the middle of that broad road to destruction
    - Many with great fanfare!

I share with you just three quick, current examples:

- 1. In this political season: Pro-choice Catholic politicians...
  - jeopardizing (I fear) their souls for the sake of votes...
  - Many of them try to justify it saying:
    - Well I'm *personally* Pro-Life, but
      - I just feel abortion should be left to individual choice...
  - That's very SLICK... but it's like me saying
    - I'm *personally* against murder, but
      - I just feel such things should be left to individual choice...
  - It's the height of lunacy, yet that's what we're being sold
    - (and what many are buying)
- 2. Just 3 weeks ago, a front page article of the Wash Post announced an
  - "After-school Satan Club" for elementary children
    - (just can't make this stuff up...!)
  - This is a group trying to go nationwide and has
    - already contacted an elementary school in nearby PG county...
- 3. Not much further down the road, in Fairfax County, VA
  - "Gender Fluidity" is being pushed as a subject to be taught as early as middle school
  - Last month, Pope Francis, speaking with a group of Polish bishops commented: (lastampa.it; Vatican Insider-The Vatican; July 27 meeting w/ Polish bishops)
    - *"Today, children, children (!) are told at school that they can choose their sex... And this is terrible... God created man and woman; God made the world like this... and we are doing exactly the opposite."*
  - Echoing the words of his predecessor Benedict XVI, he said:

- “*This is the age of sin against the Creator.*”

We: our country, our families, and in particular our children continue to be

- inundated with “progressive” morality
- inundated with the Politically Correct mindset
  - where you don’t dare have an opinion/belief
    - that might make someone else uncomfortable
  - Truth itself is not welcome if it makes someone squirm.

Thru all of this and much more

- parents are struggling *heroically* to protect their children.

And while these examples are distressing, if not appalling,

- when we see such things we should not become
  - consumed by fear or overreact.
  - We also should not underreact...
  - This evil should draw us together, unite us in prayer
  - It should inspire us to be active in our
    - school boards and PTA and voting booths
  - It should cause us to embrace and broadly teach
    - *Natural Family Planning*
  - Children and adults alike need to be taught
    - St. Pope John Paul II’s “*Theology of the Body*”
      - to learn from the earliest age
        - the dignity of the human person
        - that we are created to be far more
          - than the mere object of another’s pleasure
  - This is so important, because (as you already know)
    - our children are being fed the exact opposite
      - thru all forms of pop culture & media, and in our schools.

But my brothers & sisters

- as we scan the world around us
- taking note of the grave evils...

We would be quite wrong to stop there...

- Indeed we would be selling short the Words our Savior today:

For Jesus had a rather sobering warning to those who apparently

- fully expected to be among those who would enter by the narrow gate:
- Jesus said:
  - *“And you will say,  
‘We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets.’  
Then he will say to you,  
‘I do not know where you are from.  
Depart from me, all you evildoers!’  
And there will be wailing and grinding of teeth...*

This was shocking to Jesus’ audience! Jesus was speaking to His brother Jews, God’s Chosen People, saying that not only will many formerly pagan Gentiles enter Heaven AHEAD of them, they might make it in AT ALL...

As the saying goes: “The more things change, the more they stay the same.”

That line: *“We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets.”*

- Sounds an awful lot like... the Mass...

To modernize that verse, we might say:

- *“Hey, I went to Mass, I received Communion, I listened to your teachings...”*
- And then He will say, *“Depart from me, I do not know you...”*

Jesus cautions us that there’s more to getting to Heaven

- than just regularly attending Mass...

How often are we filling the pews on Sunday

- then looking like anything but faithful Catholics
- for the rest of the week?

How often do we talk the talk, but don't walk the walk..?

Jesus said: I do not know where you are from...

So how do I really know you? How do you really know me? How do we really know each other?? By your fruits...

- In Matthew ch 7, Jesus says: *'By their fruit will you know them...'*
- *"A good tree cannot bear bad fruit,*
  - *and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit"*

I'm here to tell you, with all charity as your Deacon, as your brother, as your friend

- We've got a whole lot of good fruit here at JDW
- and limitless potential (as do all parishes)

But we would be lying to ourselves if we did not acknowledge there are pockets

- in our homes, workplaces, schools, and even parishes
- where the fruit is not good...

And so I challenge everyone here today:

- Take a serious inventory of your life
- an honest look at your thoughts, your conversations, your heart...

In this inventory, if you find:

- Resentment, fear, alienation, wounds that don't seem to heal
- Defensive posturing, reinforcing trenches instead of building bridges
- A stiff arm instead of open arms
- A reluctance to open up and truly communicate
- A reluctance to meet people where they are
- No honest and ongoing efforts to reconcile
- No apologies, no forgiveness, no regrets

- No serious consideration of even the possibility
  - that you just might be partially in the wrong...
- Or if right now you're thinking:
  - I sure hope he/she is listening to this...!

If you see any of these things in your life:

- alarms should be ringing in your head and in your heart,
- for you and your position have been compromised by the Evil One.

It doesn't mean you a bad person (unless you choose to cling to these things)

It doesn't mean that your intentions are evil

But even with the purest of motives

- and truly, ESPECIALLY when you have the purest of motives
- Satan will seek to trip you up and bring you down.
- And he is so cunning... always looking for a way to infiltrate,
  - and then to destroy from within.

In military speak, we call this "exploiting the gap."

A classic example would be the enemy

- stealthily probing your defensive positions
  - looking for a weak spot, a chink in your armor
- Or perhaps creating a big distraction, to divert your attention
  - and thus *create* a weak spot...

But either way, the result is the same:

- the Evil One slithers in that little gap like a snake...
  - and the next thing you know
  - He's in your head and he's moving straight for your heart
  - And into your home, into your workplace, into your school

- Into your parish...

So what's the answer? How do we get back on track

- to one day successfully enter by the narrow gate?

In a word: Jesus

In our Gospel Acclamation today, Jesus says:

- *"I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life*
- *No one comes to the Father but by me..."*

Jesus is of course many things, but

- He was truly the very personification of: Humility

Humility is that crucial virtue that counters Pride (the root of all sin)

- It is kneeling before our Creator and offering ourselves to be His vessel
  - a vessel of His Peace, a vessel of His Love
  - despite what others have done to HARM me
  - despite what I may FEEL
  - despite what I may RATIONALIZE
  - despite what OTHERS may think of me
  - despite what the POLITICAL climate is
  - despite ANYTHING else you can think of
  - Humility is laying all that stuff aside – ALL of it – and allowing yourself to be a pure, unfettered vessel of Almighty God.

Is it easy? Not even maybe – it is a battle we face most every day of our lives.

So the Holy Spirit challenges us today

- with the words from our 2<sup>nd</sup> reading from Heb ch 12:
- *"Strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees"*

Strive for Gold my brothers & sisters -- strive to follow Jesus

- so as to enter by the narrow gate!