

Today's gospel happens right in the middle of Jesus's final journey to Jerusalem, in some sense it is the climax of this part of the gospel, before his passion. For today, he lays it on the line for all to hear, the commitment it takes to be a Christian, a disciple, a commitment he understands himself.

The gospel means good news but it seems like there isn't a lot of good news in today's verses. Few saved... narrow doors... locked gates... rejection... gnashing of teeth... and relegation to the bottom of the heap! Pretty depressing! But I suppose any one of us might have been a bit depressed if we were making a journey to our own death, and Jesus is human too, so maybe some of that leaks out.

But that's too easy an answer, because Jesus isn't the type to sit around feeling sorry for himself, so we are challenged today to face these tough words and try to find the good news we seek.

First off, then, he doesn't say that only a few will be saved, in fact he doesn't answer that question, "Lord will just a few be saved?" directly at all. He merely says, "Strive to enter for many will not be able!"

Now, "many" is not "all", or even most, it is just many. And since God loves us completely, totally, and boundlessly it may not take a lot of people to fail to seem like many to God.

Remember a couple of weeks ago in our readings, God said he spared a whole city of evil people for only 5 good people, well 5 must have looked like many to Him, at least enough to count for a lot.

So if Jesus is honest enough to tell us that not all of us will have what it takes to ask for salvation, at least he doesn't discourage us all by saying "only a few". So there is great hope for that.

What about all this "striving to enter the narrow door"? It takes determination and discipline - and dedication, to achieve anything worthwhile. It takes rigorous practice and diet to become a star athlete, and it must be regularly done, you can't wait for the last minute. It also takes determination to become a champion Christian and as we hear from Jesus, you can't wait until the last minute.

No A+ in school comes without study (Sorry kids, I forgot school is still a dirty word right now), no increase in allowance comes without good behaviour, no sale in business without research and persistence, no family togetherness without openness and communication.

In fact Jesus makes it very clear, that just hanging around Him won't cut it, you've got to act! You can't show up at the ballpark on world series opener day and expect to get in just because you've watched the Blue Jays on TV all year and can quote all their statistics and you have the starting pitcher's autograph on your hat.

No, you had to make the commitment, line up for hours, shell out that cold hard BIG cash for tickets and prove that getting in is worth it you! You can't just hang around the church for an hour on Sunday, quote the bible to your friends, and wear a holy medal with the Pope's picture

and expect to get into heaven.

So what are we doing? What do we do outside this church to attract God's attention. Do you help out in your community or in your school. Do you stay honest even when people can't see or at home where they'll let you get away with even if you aren't?

Do you share, or are you spending most of your money on yourself and forgetting to feel a little pain of sacrifice from time to time. Jesus uses an interesting word in his answer to the disciples, and he uses it twice, he uses the word "Begin!"

He says, "When you begin to stand outside the door", he could have simply said, "When you are outside the door." He says "When you begin to say, 'Lord, we know you, open up!'", instead of simply saying, "When you say..."

So what is Jesus pointing out to us when he uses the word "Begin", he is saying that if you wait for the door to close before you try to go in, if you wait for the door to close before you remind Jesus that you are his friend, then it will be too late. The time to begin our striving is now!

If he says "When you begin to" to his disciples in the Gospel, it is because he knows that they haven't started yet. And he says the same thing to us today; it will be too late to begin later, when we have been called to start striving a long time ago.

Are we really striving, or are we complacent when we look at others because they may seem to be doing less than we do?

Are we aware of our own weaknesses? When we pray, do we ask God to help us see where we need to put that commitment to grow and improve? If you ask Him, and really open your hearts He'll show you, and if you bring that open heart here to the Eucharist then I promise you that when you receive the body of Jesus you will get the strength to strive and the help you need to do those difficult things.

It's too easy to see others faults and to think we're doing enough by comparison when we really aren't. That is what Jesus means when he says some who are first will be last and others who are last will be first. Come and visit Sheridan Villa, and you'll see many old people who the world would consider "last" but when you meet them you'll know that they will be first in heaven.

We can't be comfortable that we are first, just because we were brought up Catholics, or the big gate at the front of heaven may shut while the narrow door on the side is still open, letting in others who couldn't get close to the front for all of us blocking the way, because they understood commitment when we didn't.

I heard a little poem in Ireland which helps me remember this lesson every time I feel a little too sure of myself and I'd like to close with that today. It goes like this.

I dreamt death came the other night,
and Heaven's Gate swung wide.

A kindly angel welcomed me,
and ushered me inside.

And there, to my astonishment,
stood folks I'd known on earth;

Some I had judged quite unfit,
or but of little worth.

Indignant words rose to my lips,
but never were set free;

For every face showed stunned surprise,
No one expected me!