

Homily St Pius & St Anthony 21st Sunday Ordinary Year C1

Jesus is asked, “Lord, will only a few people be saved?” I hear that as Jesus being asked, “Who is getting into heaven and who is not?” I love how Jesus throughout the gospel always redirects people asking questions about other people’s business. He basically tells them, “How about you?-How are you doing?” Overall, I find among us Catholics that we are a people not eager to meddle into other people’s salvation, asking questions like, “Who is getting into heaven and who is not?” I guess we figure that God has given us enough to do just managing to keep ourselves on His path? How can I drive everyone else’s truck down the road, when I need to make sure to keep mine in the right lane, and going the right way?. I’m sure we have all heard the joke (*and you can insert any denomination into the punch line: I put us in it, because, hey, we can handle it!*) about the Christian that was welcomed at the gates of heaven by St Peter. He was escorted through the halls of heaven, and down one hall, they came to a door, and St Peter said, ‘Shhhhh, we have to tiptoe by here’. So, after passing it, he asked “Why did we do that?” And St. Peter said, ‘Oh, that was the Catholic room, and they think they are the only ones up here.” Again, we could insert any denomination in the punch line, because we all need to be humble about going to heaven, and who is in and who is out. I think that such a meddling curiosity is behind that question to Jesus, “Will only a few be saved?” Of course, in that question is the ‘presumption’: We-My group are the Few! Throughout the gospel, I find that Jesus is asked such nosy questions (*presuming to know other people’s salvation*) in a couple different places in the gospel. The most personal is in the 21st chapter of John, right after Peter has made his peace with Jesus. Jesus allows him to undo his three denials of Him, by offering three affirmations of love toward Jesus, and right then, Peter (*I think he slips here again already*) inquires under his breath about the beloved disciple’s business. Peter asks, in John 21:21-22, “**Lord, what about him?**” Jesus said, “What if I want him to remain until I come again? **What concern is it of yours? You** follow me.” Jesus was gently telling Peter, “I have this covered. I have him. You simply mind yourself-follow me-do what I called you to-Don’t you worry about him.” And another time, just a little earlier in this same 13th chapter of Luke (13:4), one of the disciples basically gossips to Jesus, gloating almost over the demise of some Galileans, (*maybe wanting to judge, saying that ‘they had it coming’*) people that Pilate had persecuted and killed. Did they make it to heaven? Jesus answers by adding a story of another tragedy of bystanders being killed when a tower fell over on

them, and that some were saying wrongly it was a sign of their condemnation-the y didn't make it to heaven. Jesus corrects that presumption by saying, "Mind yourself, and be grateful that didn't happen to you". He actually says in Luke 13:2-3, & repeats it in vss 4-5, "Do you think because these Galileans suffered in this way they were greater sinners than all others? *By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!*" He is redirecting them to focus upon themselves first. How about you? How are you doing? I find Jesus making the same point, when He tells the parable of the weeds and wheat. In that parable of Matthew 13:29-30, there is an overzealous weed-puller who wants to root out all those bad weeds. But the wise farmer realizes the collateral damage such zeal is going to cause to the good wheat too. So, he says, "Let it be- the time for sorting comes at harvest-I'll take care of it." When we put ourselves up high as the judge determining who is in and who is out of heaven, Jesus redirects us to consider first, "What about me-how am I doing?"

I've heard that there will be three surprises in heaven: 1) first, I may look around and be surprised at who I see there and didn't think they'd be here then 2) I will look around and be surprised at who isn't there I thought for sure would be, and the greatest surprise will be 3) that I am there-that I made it.

Which brings us to Jesus' challenge today, telling us, "Strive to enter through the narrow door" (Luke 13:24). Jesus is saying that discipleship (and Salvation) with Him, requires effort, focus, determination. We have to be deliberate and work at it. The first clue to this, is that Jesus says, "***Strive***" as in reach for it, stretch and push yourself. And clue number two here is that He adds the part about the '***narrow***' gate. It is not wide and easy, but narrow and difficult. I think of that every-time I pull a trailer with my truck. With a trailer, I am especially watching out and thinking ahead: Some spots are easy to get into, when the opening is wide to back into, but then comes a narrow lane that makes me sweat and work hard at keeping straight. When Jesus talks about this narrow gate in Matthew, the version (Mt7:13) adds a detail of Jesus saying, "Wide and easy is the road that leads to destruction..." To get it right, we have to watch our selves with deliberate focus and attentive work. Speaking of keeping to our own lanes, I remember learning to parallel park for the driving test as a teen. I am so thankful that dad & mom took us downtown where the streets were congested and the spots all usually filled up, making it harder, that you had to drive around blocks at a time to even find an open spot. Then, we had to really work at pulling

safely to the parallel spot, with the pressure of waiting traffic in both directions. It is not like learning how to park out in the wide open frontier at the hospital parking lot or the Convention Center. (I always figured that is what is going on when I look out and see a lonely car parked way out in the Wal-Mart parking lot with an hundred empty spots around it. Or maybe that is safe parking for someone tired of finding dents in their doors, or it is their attempt to keep in good exercise walking, or what I am starting to realize as I age, I may pull way out there alone, so that I can most easily find the truck, when the leave store)!

So, Jesus' challenge today for us is to look first at our own walk with Him (how are we doing?), before jumping to judge other people's *pace* and *path* with Him. How am I doing? I am working to reflect as best I can His life to others? Do people know that I am a disciple of Jesus by how I interact with them? I spoke earlier about surprises at heaven's door, and what a surprise comes to the people in the gospel who knock on Jesus' door and heard back "I do not know you" They were at the right door, and they were saying the right thing, dropping the Lord's name, but the voice from inside was saying, "I do not recognize you." I compare that to Jesus asking us on judgement day, "How much do you resemble my way of living as disciple on earth?" Would Jesus recognize Himself in my life's witness to His words and works? Did I do what He did, and say what He said? Does enough of my life reflect and represent Him to others by how I behaved, and interacted with them? Such a reflection of Jesus Himself in my life, is what will be the opener to the door of Heaven.