

In today's Gospel, someone asked Jesus, "Lord, will only a few people be saved?" Rather than answering this question directly, Jesus tells us a story. This seeming lack of a definitive answer has led many theologians in modern times to continue to debate this question. On one side, we have Von Balthasar, who in his book "Dare We Hope", posits that we can pray and hope that God saves all people through His mercy. On the other side, we have Ralph Martin, who in his book "Will Many Be Saved?", argues that there are many who will in fact not be saved.

In responding to this debate, Jesus says, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough." He goes on to give the example of someone standing outside a locked gate, knocking and saying, "Lord, open the door for us... We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets." In response, they hear, "I do not know where you are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!" This harsh response seemingly leaves no doubt in our minds that Hell is a very real and distinct possibility for all of us.

And yet, the story does not end there. Jesus goes on to say, "people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God." This recalls our first reading in which Isaiah proclaims that God will gather people from every nation and allow them to see His glory unveiled. God will even make some of these foreigners His priests, allowing non-Jews into the very Holy of Holies where they can behold Him face-to-face. As we heard in today's Gospel, "some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

The Jews were God's chosen people, and it was shocking for them to hear that Gentiles would be allowed to enter into heaven, let alone that Gentiles might make it into Heaven before them. This was scandalous enough, but Jesus went even further. For Jesus also taught that sinners who repent and choose to do God's will can make it into heaven. Conversely, He said that those who profess piety without

actually doing God's will are at risk of damnation. As Jesus once said to those around Him, "Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you."

So, while Jesus' words might reveal that Hell is a very distinct and real possibility for us, He counters that knowledge with a message of hope that many who are considered last in this world will be the first in the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus' words challenge those of us who feel confident in our salvation to not presume on His grace, while at the same time His words comfort those of us who feel that we do not deserve His mercy.

As He says, some of those who are last will be first and some who are first will be last. Some of us who are confident in our righteousness and neglect to live out God's will in our lives will be shocked on the day of judgement when we hear, "I do not know where you are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!" Conversely, some of us who have sinned grievously in our lives but have repented will be equally shocked on the day of judgement when we hear, "Come you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

So, what is it that we must do to be saved? After Peter preached that salvation only comes through Jesus Christ, those who were listening fell at his feet, asking this same question. He told them all to repent and be baptized. We hear this same question yet again on the lips of the rich young man who approached Jesus. Jesus responded to him, saying, "Keep the commandments." When the young man said that he already did, Jesus said, "Only one thing you lack, go, sell what you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

In the end, the path to salvation is both simple and difficult. It begins when we repent from our sins and start to follow God's commands for our lives. As Jesus told the rich young man, however, this is not enough on its own. We must also learn to let go of all those things which keep us from following Christ. Sometimes, this

means that we must let go of our material possessions and other things that we put before God. Other times, however, this might mean that we might need to learn to let go of our past sins, accepting Christ's forgiveness and rejecting any feelings that we are unworthy to follow after Him.

After letting go of these things that keep us from following Jesus, we will then be ready to journey with Him all the way to Jerusalem. Recall that in today's Gospel Jesus said that those who want to be saved must "strive to enter through the narrow gate." Jesus Himself is the "narrow gate" that we must pass through, and the wood of this gate is the Cross which bore our sins. We "strive" to enter through this gate by picking up and embracing the sufferings of our own crosses as well.

As Jesus said, however, we will not be able to pass through this gate by our strength alone. We need God's grace to strengthen us so that we can pick up our crosses and follow after Jesus, "striving" along that steep path which leads up to the new heavenly Jerusalem. While it will never be easy to shoulder the weight of our sins and sufferings, through God's grace it is possible. As Jesus says elsewhere in Scripture, "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

"Lord, will only a few people be saved?" While theologians may continue to debate this abstract question, it is not the real question that we should be asking. The real question, the one that keeps us up at night, is whether we dare hope that we ourselves will personally be saved. And the simple answer that Jesus gives us is yes, yes we do dare hope... we do dare hope that He will save us as long as we repent from our sins, accept the forgiveness which has been offered to us, and strive to pick up our crosses daily and follow after Him.