

St Pius & St Anthony 21st Sunday Ordinary Time Year C(2025) Luke

Jesus is asked “Will only a few be saved?” What does Jesus answer? Not with a clear ‘Yes’ or ‘No’! His roundabout response seems to be Him saying, “Don’t you worry about numbers, you just make sure that you one of them!” Or maybe, “Don’t go meddling in others’ business-just keep focused on the narrow door yourself!”

His answer about the narrow door and then the locked door, reminded me of one of our nightly duties, back when I was growing up, working in my family’s grocery business. At the end of the day, one of the closing duties, was to sort the returned coke bottles at the end of the day. I know this dates me, but do you remember the old glass soft drink bottles that had printed on their necks, “Return for Deposit”. Well, in the store, we kept a bottle cart, up by the front door, that people would show us their returns, and then set them down into the cart, before going back to the shelves to pick up new drinks. And at the end of the day, one of our closing duties was, to wheel the cart to the back room, where here was a wall stacked wood crates that held the old bottles. We had to sort them by brand and by size. We had to know that No, ‘Upper Ten’ was not a CocaCola product so it didn’t go into the red coke crates, they went into the tan ‘RC’ crates, but the Sprites were CocaCola product and they went into the red coke crates. But some brands sorted out by size too. Coca-cola had not only heavy 2 liter glass bottles, but also 32 oz, 16 oz, 10 oz and 6 ½ (funny trivia about that 6 ½ size- was common in old barber shops! Ask the older generation, they always swore coke had special blend syrup in those bottles and it was the best- no match- a different taste than big bottles- was it difference in carbonation? but they all swore to it different & would only buy the little cokes!) But my point in bringing this up, is that with that nighttime duty, they had to fit - the right bottle put into the right opening in the crates. We strove to match them - put the right ones in the right place.

I find this is something like what Jesus is talking about when advising us to strive to enter through the narrow gate. Not everything gets through, and we must exert effort to make the right entry. *(two words suggest that – strive and strong)*

I hear Jesus saying that to get through the ‘narrow’ door, you have to fit the part and look like Christ or be familiar enough to Christ. There must be some kind of recognition – a likeness shown, to be allowed in. Again this reminds me of the kids’ toy so commonly given to toddlers that teaches them shapes or colors. It is a framed table stand, with the top surface board having different-shaped holes for pieces to slip through. Triangles will only go through triangle hole. Squares only go through square holes and circles through the circle hole. And often the shapes are specific colors, all the circles are all red, the squares yellow, and so on, to teach the names of colors too. Or I saw a neat floor-size jig saw puzzle that pieces a

choo -choo train together, with the engine being #1, and then only the #2 car fit next, and all the way down the train line of cars. Only the next, right piece fit!

So Jesus is teaching us that getting through salvation's gate, there is a particular shape that moves through it, and that shape is the **form** of Christ's image – we must represent, resemble Him – or look like Him! Something of us, has to 'flash' Christ at the door to be allowed in. There is a reckoning at the door – a review with a recognition or not to pass through. And there may come a shock – We hear Luke's gospel today, but it sounds similar to the surprise that people experience about being welcomed into the Kingdom of God or not, over in the gospel of Matthew 25:31-46 (popular sheep & goats parable), where we hear about folks being sorted out (to the left -no entrance & to the right yes entrance). They are welcomed in or not, by the measure of how they reflected or had shown the teaching/example of Jesus – emulating it in their own lives. Was their enough Christ-like reflecting image in them? Do they love like Him, do they serve like Him, do what He did, Walk like Christ and Talk like Christ, especially toward **the least** of His brothers/sisters. "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Mt 25:40) To get through the 'Christ door' we must fit the part.

Or at least our hearts must. To sidestep the whole theological controversy about works vs. grace in attaining salvation, and not defining particular required actions that guarantee our saving entrance into heaven , maybe it is not a specific action of ours that opens the door, but it is Christ-like heart and His disposition in our us that opens the door – our knowing that we need Him and always acting accordingly. Our heart must be His, to get in. He has to recognize our humble **admission** of 'needing' Him- our desire to be like and live like Him. I find this is why He adds at the end of the parable the proverbial statement, "Some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last" (Luke 13:30) *(Interesting note here is that this verse is found in all three synoptic gospels and in John's Revelation – it is also in Mk 10:31, 2x in Matt 19:30 & Mt 20:16 7 found in Revelation's Title of the Lamb as 'Alpha & Omega' Rev 1:8, 21:6, 22:13, also 1:17-'first & last')*

Jesus is cautioning us against an arrogant presumption, as if we are entitled to salvation. If I claim 'Salvation', demanding it as a right, that sounds like the arrogant and superficial namedroppers in His story ('Lord, Lord' Lk 13:25-26 & Mt 7:22) that demand entrance, as if saying at the door--"**Check your list again, of course, I'm on your list, I ate at your table, and you visited my streets**" (Lk 13:26), But SURPRISE, two times they hear the response, like a haunting echo, 'I do not know where you are from" (Lk 13:25, 27). That means He is saying, "I do not recognize you" -"I'm not seeing me in you - a Christ-like disposition or Christ-like deeds in you". And Only Christ - fits in, here! "You might claim My name, but I'm not seeing much of my influence in your life's reflection" Have I represented, resembled His heart, His attitude, His word and His actions in my life? That is the fit, that is the ticket. The Christ door is open to who reflects-shows Christ to others

So Jesus cautions us to remain humble, prepared, but humble. Not to presume or take for granted whose kingdom it is. It is His and His to let us in or put us out. We just need to make sure we reflect Him! Look like Him (as best we can with His grace!) We may be surprised at the door! You know they say there will be three surprises at heaven's gate-on that day of reckoning-recognizing:

- 1) We will look around & be surprised at who is not there, we thought would be
- 2) We will look around and be surprised at who is there, we never thought would be
- 3) And the third will be the fact (God-willing) that we are let in!

So we do not want to be surprised, so we keep Christ's humble disposition, His heart in ours, and we 'strive' & pray for strength as He calls us to. That we may be recognized and welcomed in to His Kingdom.

1 Corinthians 10:12 "whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall"? How often Jesus says "Watch out" (Mk 13:9) or "Be prepared" (Lk 12:40) "Be on guard at all times" (Luke 21:36).