

Fr. John's Homily for August 21, 2022; 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

JMJ CHS

There are two readings today that I like to talk about. One is the Gospel and the other one is the letter to the Hebrews. First the Gospel.

“Enter by the narrow gate.. There is that one short verse at the center of the reading that is kind of special to us around here. We have our very own *“narrow gate”* out on the *Trinity Trail*. A white picket fence with a swinging gate that enters into our trail that winds through the woods which is the home of several statues and shrines. And there is also an altar out there named after our founding pastor, Fr. Charlie Irvin. If you haven't visited yet, you should. We have one more statue to complete and it is Bishop Baraga.

But Jesus gives a warning here. And again He uses an agricultural image. A gate. Gates are associated with enclosures and are there to protect its contents, be it a garden, a vineyard or various types of animals. But in the analogy, the gate represents the entry into Heaven. And the implication is that because it's narrow, many will not be able to enter in. So the admonition is to not be complacent or lazy, but to be informed, careful and vigilant because it is not gonna be easy. Jesus says this in many different ways, and it is an important message because I think that a lot of people these days have become quite complacent about what it is going to take to be able to pass through *“the pearly gates.”*

I personally think we have been sold a bill of goods in the last 50 years or so. There are teachers among us who will still say that nobody will be lost, and that everybody goes to Heaven. Now granted, God is merciful, it is indeed His greatest attribute, but He is also just. And I think we would do well to listen to the many different types of warnings the Lord provides us with. We certainly don't want any surprises whenever we appear at that gate, and we certainly don't want to hear a voice on the security intercom asking *“Excuse me, but do I know you?”*

“But you taught us, we shared bread and wine, right here, in your presence.”

“Sorry, but I just don't recognize you.”

Now I personally think that Jesus is *‘hamming it up’* a little bit here to make a point. But He is very serious – don't be complacent.

There are many aspects to not being complacent, and being prepared, but I guess the one criteria that I would like to mention today is the importance of being here at Mass. It is, after all, a commandment. A dual commandment. First we recall that God told Moses to tell the people, *“Remember to keep Holy the Sabbath.”* And then Jesus said at the last supper, *“Do this, in memory of me.”*

Nowadays we call the Sabbath *The Lord's Day* and we celebrate it on Sundays. And it means coming here for *Eucharist*, which means *Thanksgiving*. And to be fed with the bread of life. *The living bread come down from heaven.* Holy Communion.

It is important to give thanks to God. It is a sign of our love for Him. Yes, it takes effort to get out of bed on a Sunday morning after you have worked so hard all week. It can be difficult. But, as Jesus said, "*The Sabbath was actually made for you, not you for the Sabbath.*"

So it is good for us to be here because it is here that we are fed in those different ways we have talked about recently. Fed by interaction with our Holy Spirit faith Community, fed by the Word of God, and the prayers, fed with spiritual food and drink, and the reflections on the scriptures we call the homily. All of these serve to be *a lamp for our feet. And a light for our path* through life.

We even have that little reminder out there in the hall above your heads as you walk in. It's from the old testament, spoken by Jacob. He said something then that we can apply to our sanctuary here and now. "*How amazing is this place. This is nothing less than the House of God and the Gate of heaven.*"

OK a little bit about that other reading. We are all expected to do some Bible reading on our own, at home. Yes, it is supposed to be our guidebook, an owner's manual for our life. But sometimes we wait until those darker moments in our lives to open up the Bible to hopefully find something that will give us hope or direction.

I had one of those low moments back many years ago when I was about 30 years old. In the midst of a time of frustration, verging on despair, I randomly opened my Bible to 1 Peter which told me that '*...now, for a little while, if need be, I would have to endure various trials, so that....*' The implication was that I was actually going through something that is startling and unpleasant, but will be for my own good. Well, it was certainly exciting to experience that connection between REAL life and *the living word of God*, and it encouraged me to dive even deeper into the Bible, to verify what I thought had just happened to me.

I didn't have to search far and I didn't have to wait long before I found a second passage that described my circumstances. It is today's reading from *The Letter to the Hebrews*. It talks about God disciplining those He loves. So the first thing I guess I felt was that God loved me, and saw me as a son. It goes on to ask, "And what son is not disciplined by his father". Discipline then is an act of love. It is not something that someone enjoys, but has to endured, for our own good.

There is a term that can be used to describe this discipline. It was coined by the famous Spanish Carmelite, St. John of the Cross. It is a term that is, well, self-explanatory. It is the famous *Dark Night of the Soul*. This is far different than just being down in the dumps. Or in a situational depression. No, this is something that comes from God. God is a drill instructor in the Marines.

And as unpleasant as it can be, The Lord encourages us to quit our bellyaching, to show a little courage, and resolve, and to recognize again that this is for our own good. It is ultimately for our own salvation, so that we might be confident and unafraid when we come to that narrow gate.

~Fr. John