

21 Sunday OT C 2016
August 20-21
Frazee/Callaway

Let's look at the details of the gospel for a moment. "A person asked him: 'Lord, is it true that only a few are saved?'" The question refers to the number: how many are saved, many or few? Jesus changed the center of attention, from the number, to how it is possible to be saved. He said that to be saved we need to enter by "the narrow door."

In changing the question, Jesus encourages his disciples to pass from the level of curiosity to the pursuit of authentic wisdom, from the pointless questions that excite people to the real problems of life. From this we are able to understand the absurdity of those who even think they know the exact number of the saved: 144,000.

This number, which appears in Revelation, has a merely symbolic value (the square of 12, the number of the tribes of Israel, multiplied by 1,000) and is explained in this expression: "a great multitude which no man could number" [Revelation 7:9]. If that is really the number of the saved, then we could spare ourselves the effort. On the door to paradise the sign "No Occupancy" would surely have been written long ago.

Jesus is not interested in revealing to us the number of the saved, but rather the way to be saved.

The fact of belonging to a specific people, race, tradition or institution is not useful to be saved. To be saved is a personal decision, followed by a certain conduct in life.

This is even clearer in Matthew's text, which contrasts two ways and two gates, one narrow and the other wide [see Matthew 7:13-14]. We must be careful not to fall into the temptation of believing that everything goes magnificently well for the wicked while everything goes wrong for the good. The way of the wicked is wide; yes, but only at the beginning. The more we progress on it, the more it becomes narrow and bitter. It is extremely narrow at the end, as it leads to a dead end. The happiness experienced in it diminishes as it is experienced, until it becomes nauseating and sad. With all sin there can be a certain kind of inebriation, as with a drug. As time passes, an ever-stronger dosage is necessary to produce the same intense pleasure until the body ceases to respond; and then comes the collapse; spiritual, emotional and sometimes even physical.

The way of the just, on the contrary, is narrow at the beginning, but then becomes wide, as we find hope, joy, and peace of heart on it. It leads to life, not death.

In his letter to the Hebrews, St. Paul offers us a mindset, a disposition for times of struggle. Struggle does not necessarily mean that we are doing something wrong. St. Paul implores us to endure all trials as if they were given to us from the Lord in order to teach us an important lesson.

Be careful; this is not to say that the Lord has given us every trial. Indeed, some trials are self-inflicted, some are the result of the sins and failures of others. Some trials ought to be avoided because they are simply unnecessary suffering and grief.

No matter what their cause, the Lord can use times of trial to teach us, to form us, to love us. What is your trial today? What is the one pain or annoyance in your life that you would really like to go away? Before it is gone, ask Jesus what he would like to teach you. Ask him to use the trial to keep you on the narrow path.