

Homily – 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)

Readings: Isaiah 66:18-21; Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13; Luke 13:22-30

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today's Gospel presents us with a very challenging and sobering question: someone asks Jesus, *"Lord, will only a few be saved?"* (Lk 13:23). It's the kind of question we might also want answered. We want numbers, statistics, certainty. But Jesus doesn't answer with figures—He answers with an invitation: *"Strive to enter through the narrow door."* (Lk 13:24).

This is the key message: salvation is not automatic; it requires effort, conversion, perseverance, and above all, a real relationship with Jesus.

1. The Narrow Door

The "narrow door" is not about physical size but about spiritual demand. To pass through it requires humility, detachment, and love. Many want to enter, Jesus says, but will not be strong enough. Why? Because we often carry too much baggage—our pride, selfishness, attachments to sin. The door is narrow because it demands that we let go of ourselves and allow Christ to reshape our lives.

St. Cyril of Alexandria comments:

"The narrow gate is the life according to the Gospel, demanding self-control and struggles against the flesh. Few desire to endure such things, preferring instead a life of pleasure."

(Glaphyra on the Pentateuch)

So the challenge is clear: the Christian life is not about comfort, but about daily effort to love God and neighbour.

2. God's Discipline – A Loving Father

The second reading from Hebrews reminds us that the trials we face in life are not signs of God's rejection but of His love: *"The Lord disciplines those whom He loves"* (Heb 12:6). Discipline is never pleasant, but it bears fruit—training us in holiness.

Think of an athlete: no one wins medals without discipline, training, sacrifice. In the same way, God, like a loving Father, allows difficulties so that our faith may grow stronger. St. Augustine said:

“God does not abandon us in trials, but through them He shapes us, as the artisan shapes rough wood into a work of beauty.”

So our sufferings, when united to Christ, are not meaningless—they are the chisels of God shaping us for heaven.

3. Salvation for All Nations

The first reading from Isaiah gives us a wonderful vision: God will gather people from every nation, every language. *“They shall come to see my glory”* (Is 66:18). The narrow door is open to all—it is not limited to one nation, one race, one group. The banquet of the Kingdom is universal.

Jesus echoes this when He says: *“People will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God”* (Lk 13:29). This is Good News for us: salvation is not exclusive. But it also comes with a warning: those who presumed they were “insiders” may find themselves outside. It is not enough to say, *“We ate and drank with you”*—we must live the Gospel in our daily lives.

As St. John Chrysostom preached:

“It is not enough to be near the Church in body; what is required is to be near in heart and in deeds.”

(Homily on Matthew 19)

4. The Great Reversal

Jesus warns of a great reversal: *“Some who are last will be first, and some who are first will be last.”* This should shake us. Familiarity with Jesus, mere external religion, is not a guarantee. What matters is conversion of heart. The “last” are those we might least expect—sinners who repented, people on the margins who embraced the Gospel. The “first” are those who thought they were safe but lived without true love.

5. Practical Application

So how do we strive to enter through the narrow door?

- Through humility: recognizing our need for God’s mercy.
- Through prayer and sacraments: which give us strength for the journey.
- Through love in action: especially toward the poor, the stranger, the marginalized.

- Through perseverance: not giving up when faith demands sacrifice.

Conclusion

Dear friends, the Lord today invites us to enter through the narrow door. It is not easy, but it leads to life. Isaiah reminds us that God desires all people to be saved. Hebrews encourages us that even trials are part of God's loving discipline. And Jesus warns us that salvation is serious—it demands a real response.

Let us then ask for the grace to live not as “spectators” of the Gospel, but as true disciples who strive each day to walk the path of holiness. For in the end, the joy of sitting at the banquet of the Kingdom is worth every sacrifice.

Amen.