21st Sunday of Ordinary Time August 21, 2022

An evangelist at a tent revival meeting, preaching on today’s gospel text was warning his congregation about the eternal damnation. “On the day of Judgment,” he said, “there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.” But an old woman in the crowd asked, “Look preacher, I ain’t got no teeth!” “Never mind,” says the evangelist, “teeth will be provided.” What a silly explanation.

In today’s gospel, somebody in the crowd asked Jesus this question: “Lord, will only a few people be saved?” Jesus did not give the number of those who will be saved. He didn’t really give an answer to the man’s question, but he just said: “Strive to enter through the narrow gate…” In other words, he is answering a more important question, “How can I be saved?”

You know there are questions that have a special appeal to the mass media and to popular imagination. Like for example: When will the world come to an end? When is Armageddon coming? Who is the Anti-Christ? Why is 666, the mark of the Anti-Christ? What about the three days darkness? I just want you to know that these are the questions Jesus does not want to answer, I’m sure of that.

I invite you to reflect on this gospel which is about salvation in Jesus Christ and therefore entering God’s Kingdom. Let us look for answers in a book titled *Love Like Jesus* where it is mentioned that there are three wrong questions we ask, and our Lord wants to correct. It begins by saying that many of our problems in life come from our common practice of asking the wrong questions. We ask the wrong questions. Therefore, we also get the wrong answers.

The first wrong question is: “How many will be saved?” It is similar to the question that is asked in today’s gospel. It is the wrong question to ask because the right question is, ‘how will we be saved?’ The Lord does not give us numbers of those who will be saved. The Lord instead shows us the way. We will be saved by entering through the narrow gate. For us Catholics, the possession of a baptismal certificate and regular Mass attendance does not guarantee our salvation.  We must go through, as Jesus tells us, the narrow gate.  So, what exactly is the narrow gate?  The narrow gate is every moral decision that we will ever make.  Do we choose for God, or do we choose against God? The second reading tells us that the trials and tribulations of life are not signs of the absence of God but rather that they are signs of his presence.  It tells us that God is allowing challenges to come into our lives so that we can grow closer to him. In other words, following Christ is not the easy way.

The second wrong question is: “Where is the gate?” it is the wrong question to ask because the question shouldn’t be, ‘where is the gate?’ Because there is no gate. The proper question to ask is not, ‘where is the gate,’ but ‘who is the gate?’ The gate is not a place. The gate is not to be found on a map. The gate is a person – Jesus Christ himself is the gate.

The last wrong question is: “What must I do?” it is wrong to ask this question because what the Lord wants us to ask is, ‘What must I continue doing?’ To tell you the truth I am like most people, we are a people who are good at the start of an activity but sometimes fail to sustain it all the way through. We are a people who are good at the beginning but when it comes to sustaining it, that is, where we falter.

So let us not ask, ‘how many will be saved,’ but rather, ‘how will we be saved.’ Let us not ask, ‘where is the gate,’ but rather, ‘who is the gate.’ Let us not ask, ‘what must I do,’ but rather, ‘what must I continue doing.’

We should take the time to reflect on these questions by asking ourselves to look into our hearts and ask ourselves: “What are the questions in my heart right now that remain unanswered?” Maybe the source of our pain is by making the mistake of asking the wrong questions in life.

Let us contemplate this thought, a door says a lot. A door can free us or imprison us. A door can make us feel comfortable or make us feel insecure. A door can shield us or expose us.

As we go through our life, we will always encounter doors. Finally, at the end of our lives we will have to face a final door. Today’s gospel speaks of a narrow door that could separate or lead us to God at the end of our lives.

What does the image of a door say to us about the kingdom of God?  Jesus’ story about the door being shut to those who come too late suggests they had offended their host and deserved to be excluded. It was customary for teachers in Jesus’ time to close the door on tardy students and not allow them back for a whole week in order to teach them a lesson in discipline and faithfulness.

The imagery of the “door” remined me of a story. A sick man turned to his doctor, as he was preparing to leave the examination room and said, “Doctor, I am afraid to die. Tell me what lies on the other side.”

Very quietly, the doctor said, “I don’t know.”

“You don’t know? You, a Christian man, do not know what is on the other side?”

As the doctor was holding the handle of the door; on the other side came a sound of scratching and whining.

When he opened the door, a dog sprang into the room and leaped onto him with an eager show of gladness.

Turning to the patient, the doctor said, “Did you notice my dog? He’s never been in this room before. He didn’t know what was inside. He knew nothing except that his master was here, and when the door opened, he sprang in without fear. I know little of what is on the other side of death, but I do know one thing.

I know my Master is there, and that is enough.”