

21<sup>st</sup> Sunday (C)

21<sup>st</sup> August 2016

‘Enter by the narrow door’

Is 66: *all your brothers ... from all the nations to my holy mountain in Jerusalem.*

Ps 116: *Go out to the whole world, proclaim the Good News.*

Heb 12: *the Lord trains the ones that he loves ... Suffering is part of your training.*

Lk 13: *try to enter by the narrow door*

As you know, this year — December last to November coming — has been designated the ‘Holy Year of Mercy’ by Pope Francis. We are trying to live this year conscious both of the mercy God offers us in generous forgiveness, but also of the mercy that the Lord expects us to show to others — both by the spiritual care and by the physical care of others. It’s very special that the Year of Mercy coincides with the Gospel of Luke which we have been hearing most of this year, ‘Year C,’ since Luke is the great Gospel of mercy, filled with many instances of Jesus’s reaching out to the poor, the disenfranchised, the weak, the ‘outsiders’ ... and his is the Gospel with the great parables of mercy, too, like the Prodigal Son.

But today’s passage seems all the harsher, doesn’t it? What with all the talk of the door being shut, and the words of Our Lord, “I do not know where you come from.” There seems to be a lack of mercy, here, in this passage, ...

doesn’t there? But we have to take this passage in the context of the whole Gospel. We know that the Lord is merciful, that He urges us with love, time and time again, to receive His mercy and forgiveness. But if we refuse and refuse, well ... there comes a point when He chooses to accept our refusal. Painful though it is to Him, yet ultimately the Lord who has endowed us with free will, respects our free will, and leaves us on the outside.

The Lord states that the path to life — the path to heaven — is a “narrow one,” but He doesn’t say that it’s an obscure one, or a hidden one, or tricky to find, or a mystery to trace. Not at all: His path is very clear for all to see. The Gospel isn’t complicated or only for the ultra-intelligent or the specially initiated. 2000 yrs of saints show us that the path to life, the path which is Jesus Christ, is plainly for all of humanity, of every walk of life — and especially is available to the humble and lowly; it’s not hidden from them and only the preserve of some elite.

But we most certainly do have to take that narrow way — the way that demands faithfulness to God; it

demands some level of sacrifice; it requires us to be constant in prayer and commitment to God; and to be fervent in our charity to others. We mustn't rest on our laurels, and imagine that we are sailing very nicely into heaven — it's all too easy to drift into some self-satisfied state with how we're doing spiritually. I am always slightly amused by the excuses that crop up, there, in the Gospel ... the lame excuses that are used to try and claim some sort of a relationship with the Lord: "You once ate and drank in our company; You taught in our streets." I could almost imagine the Lord replying, "And ...? ... So...?" we can't just claim a faith, or expect salvation, on the basis of some vague connection with the Lord, or with the Church. The path to heaven in fact isn't vague or weak or woolly, but makes real demands on us. It is a joyful, yet an exacting thing to be holy. It is a truly worthwhile thing, to take the "narrow path," and to avoid the huge broad boulevards that lead away from God and to nothing in particular. We need, each of us, to discover the joy there is in being utterly faithful to God, in His Church.

So, if today we are challenged by the Gospel words of Jesus — well and good. We know that He is loving and merciful; He has come in person to show us the Way, not just to point out the way, but to walk that very Way Himself; we know that He wants nothing less than to have us safe in His Kingdom; but we also know that He won't force our hand. Instead, He invites, insistently, convincingly, lovingly, that we take the narrow path which leads to life. His divine, infinite love, appeals for our human love to respond; and He knows that this is what will lead to our blessedness and happiness; nothing else. The Lord urges us to take the 'narrow way' of committed love for Himself and for our neighbour, because His is Creation, and He knows what is good for us. Let's pray that in this Holy Year of Mercy we sense in a new and heartfelt way that urgent appeal of our Saviour that we take more seriously our Christian life. Let's show our daily commitment to Him, especially in our prayers, and in the Holy Eucharist, and let Him lead us away from our straying into sin, and towards that glorious narrow gate of heaven.