

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

25<sup>th</sup> August 2019

'The strait and narrow way'

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*

A Bank Holiday, and the sun is shining! This isn't what we are used to. We generally expect it to be wet and miserable for a Bank Holiday, don't we? I remember hosting a garden party here the other year, on this Bank Holiday, and it was the wettest, windiest, greyest, day of the year! So we still have the tendency to pack a folding umbrella with us, wherever we go, don't we, even if it's looking nice! We know always to plan ahead, to err on the safe side.

Our Lord asks us to be prepared our whole life long, not just for the lesser matter of the weather, but for the all-important matter of our eternal life and salvation. In the Gospel, always, Jesus urges us to be attentive, to have a focus, to concentrate on what we're doing. Life is full of all sorts of distractions — many of them perfectly good and innocent — but these shouldn't allow us to veer off the path of true life. Our Lord uses that phrase that has entered the English language, "the strait and narrow way," to indicate

the path that we are to follow. His Way — the way of the Gospel — is not a broad avenue in which we have ample latitude to basically live life as we see fit. His is a "strait and narrow way" which demands attention, focus, concentration; it needs us to be serious about our spiritual life. I don't mean "serious" as in lacking in any humour; in fact, many of the most holy people have a lightness and a cheerfulness that is infectious. But we can't be *laissez-faire* about our faith, our prayer, our religious lives. We need to apply ourselves, we need to be committed and make sacrifices for the Lord.

On the one hand, finding that narrow way, sticking to that path is not hard, for the Lord Jesus has trodden it before us, He has shown it to us without any shadow of a doubt. Our faith is not some esoteric set of beliefs, only for the highly educated or elite initiates. No — it is in plain sight, it is spelt out clearly by Our Lord in His human words and actions, by His ministry and by His sacrifice. Rarely, if ever, is Our Lord obscure or unclear. He has shown us the way, and it is Himself. He is, as He says, "the Way, the

Truth and the Life.” “Come,” He says, “follow Me.” We don’t need to begin from scratch in order to work out what it means to live and good life. The Lord sets out the principles of holiness, based on our loving God and neighbour, keeping our selfishness in check, and with our sights set on heaven. On that level, our faith is not difficult. We are not in the dark: the Gospel is out in the open for all to see. Our Lord spoke it not in secret, but in broad daylight.

The problem comes, not in the clarity of Our Lord’s message, but in the ever-present temptation to sin, to ignore the message, to follow the distractions. This is why Our Lord keeps warning us, and reminding us: follow Me! — keep to “the strait & narrow,” don’t lose sight of Me, don’t abandon Me, don’t give up on your daily prayer, don’t stay away from the Church and the Sacraments! Jesus gives us these clear reminders in the Gospel not to harangue us, but to protect us! He is our Shepherd, our “good shepherd,” who cares so much for us. This is why He gives us these reminders, and sometimes they are stern reminders. I’m OK

with that, I know I need it. I know I need every day to curb my tendency to be lazy in my faith, and to apply myself to my prayer and my charity.

There is a beautiful prayer by Padre Pio, called simply “Stay With Me, Lord,” which expresses our deep need for the Lord to keep us attentive to being close to Him always. I won’t quote all of it (maybe you might like to look it up), but here are the opening lines. These, don’t forget, are words of a terrifically holy Franciscan saint, ... and yet he knew just how easily he could fall away. We need to pray the same, daily ...

**Stay with me, Lord, for it is necessary to have You present so that I do not forget You. You know how easily I abandon You.**

**Stay with me, Lord, because I am weak and I need Your strength, that I may not fall so often.**

**Stay with me, Lord, for You are my life, and without You, I am without fervour.**

**Stay with me, Lord, for You are my light, and without You, I am in darkness.**

**Stay with me, Lord, to show me Your will.**

**Stay with me, Lord, so that I hear Your voice and follow You.**

**Stay with me, Lord, for I desire to love You very much, and always be in Your company.**

**Stay with me, Lord, if You wish me to be faithful to You ...**