

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Oct 29th 2014

Today's first reading to the Ephesians contains good advice to this early Christian community about establishing a social order that will lead to a peaceful existence. There is wise guidance for families regarding respectful behavior towards one another, both parents and children. The directives given to slaves and their masters contain the same expectations we have today of the workplace. It might read something like this: "Employees, give your employer your best efforts always, not just when they are watching; don't hang out in the break room for long periods of time. Employers, treat your employees honestly and fairly; give them a just wage and do not take advantage of them." Why? Because in God's eyes we are equal. It all seems straightforward and reasonable.

The gospel passage from Luke describes a conversation Jesus has with followers about who will be "saved". He uses the image of a "narrow gate", saying many will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough, and many others will be turned away when they knock on the door. In the context of today's first reading, there is a keen sense that Jesus is "upping the ante." Yet he doesn't tell his followers what is necessary. He leaves them with more questions than answers. "What is the narrow gate and who will have the strength? What do I need to do to pass through safely? If it is not enough that we know you and follow your teachings, what else is required? Who are the last, who are the first, and where am I?" And then it dawns on them, "wait a minute, you've been talking about a God of great mercy, compassion, love and forgiveness all these weeks and months that we have followed you....we are good people.. What could we possibly do that would incur this judgment and cause us to be "cast out" and denied salvation?"

What is the "narrow gate"? It can be a metaphor for many things, all challenging. Perhaps a reminder that we can never be complacent in our faith. We may have made a commitment to follow Jesus but that means we are on "the way"; we can never say "I have arrived; I'm done."

Or, it may refer to the responsibility we each have for the life we have been given. "Going along with the masses" will not enable me pass through the "narrow gate".

Or, a reminder for continual alertness to the "narrow gate" that is the result of discernment for the many decisions of life....merely following the rules of custom and culture will not lead to salvation. We need to give up our programmed way of making decisions, e.g. always choosing the "harder" thing, following the letter of the law, always saying "yes" to others, or whatever other ways we avoid the sometimes tough work of listening for God.

Or this: the "narrow gate" of the surprise revealed when we attend to the present moment; not bound by resentment from the past nor fears of the future.

Perhaps Jesus was simply tired of people following him wanting answers and wanting to be told what to do...perhaps he wanted to shake them up and invite them to reconsider the mystery of God and God's ways, and leave them with puzzlement.

A good way to our start our day; pondering the mystery of God and holding many questions.

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