



Sermon

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When I was on a mission trip to Mexico sponsored by the seminary, we came upon a very remote village. Our professor was going to speak; however, upon arrival, we realized that the villagers spoke broken Spanish and Nahuatl. Fortunately one of the students traveling was from Mexico and knew enough Nahuatl that he could translate for the professor. The professor began, "There are two types of thinking: abstract and concrete." The interpreter looked at the professor, then looked at the people, seeing the children with no shoes, grandmothers with delicate features, translated: "My brothers and sisters, I come to you today all the way from the Pontifical College Josephinum to talk to you about our Lord Jesus Christ." From that statement on, the sermon belonged to the seminarian.

Knowing we are sponsoring not one but two seminary students this year, I could not help to reflect back upon my

time in the seminary. One of the things I grin about as I reflect on those many nights, were the in-depth theological discussions we had. I smile because I realized of all the postulations and discussions, we did not know the most crucial aspect that the truth must be applied to our own heart.

Our morning Gospel passage is a continuation of Jesus' teaching ministry on his journey to Jerusalem, the place of rejection by a nation and the horror of the Cross. Somewhere in some village, some unnamed person in the crowd asked an interesting theological question. "Lord, are there just a few being saved?" A question we may have wondered about ourselves as we look at the billions of pagans compared with the few committed Christians. But Jesus did not answer the question directly. Instead, He directed the issue away from the abstract theological speculation and towards a specific application for each person in the crowd. The man asked, "Will the saved be few?" Jesus turned it around and asked, "Will you be among the saved?"

This was a crowd with mostly religious Jews. They knew Hebrew scripture and lived a fundamental adherence to it. Jesus was not talking to the pagans but the church of the day. These people assumed they were saved and going to Heaven. Jesus gave them and us some valuable and practical lessons on the subject of salvation, namely that salvation requires our earnest effort, our urgent attention, and our careful self-examination.

Jesus did not say let's break up into groups and speculate about salvation. He was concerned about the personal salvation of His hearers. Rather than a discussion, Jesus gave a command that applied the question to His hearers' hearts: "strive to enter by the narrow door."

Salvation requires our earnest effort because the door is narrow and exclusive, not wide and all-inclusive.

Folks, I would love to tell you that if you are a good person and try, you will go to Heaven. Jesus says the door is narrow. There is exclusivity which this world hates. Jesus did not tell us, nor will it be found in any seminary, the dimensions of this door. It is narrow only for you to go through. It is not big enough for our egos, our selfish desires, or even our theoretical postulations. Believe me; I squirm with this narrow door Jesus tells us about. I would love for the door to be wide and all-inclusive. But Jesus says there is one door and only one door and it is narrow. To reinforce the narrowness of the door He says to strive to go through it.

“Strive” comes from the Greek word used in describing athletic contests and of war. It implies that there is a great deal of effort. You don't win battles or athletic games by being passive. Have you ever seen a gold medalist racer say, “I looked out the window and saw everyone gathering so I went and thought, it would be neat to run in this race and here I won.” Of course not. Every athlete who wins strives to win. That athlete invests high energy and effort into winning. It is not an accident if he

wins. The result is from deliberate and sustained effort. Not everyone receives the prize: there are only a few winners. The word strive, then, means we are not going to just stroll through this door. But it is going to take deliberate thought and effort to go through it. Christ alone is the Way, the Truth, and Life; no one comes to the Father except by Him. (John 14:16).

Jesus is not talking about salvation by works or human effort. He is talking about our attitude toward it. Those who are mildly interested in salvation will not obtain it. We need to have a view as an athlete, that when every part of your body is saying enough, you continue on and plow ahead. That is the required effort for us here.

Salvation requires our earnest effort because many will seek to enter and will not be able to do so. You cannot be half-hearted or go with the crowd. You must strive to enter the narrow door.

Urgent attention: the time is coming soon when the door will be shut. There is only one chance to get into that door. When that door is closed, those inside are inside, and those outside are outside. Period. When will this door be shut? It might be this very hour. It might be years. We do not know. Don't speculate, live as this is the only moment you have. **STRIVE**. Don't be casual with Jesus; instead, seek a personal relationship with Him. There are horrible consequences if we make a mistake. Ultimately there are two categories: those inside and those outside.

David Brainerd, the great missionary to the American Indians, was once witnessing to a chief who was very close to trusting in Christ. But he held back. Brainerd got up, took a stick, drew a circle on the dirt around the chief, and said, "decide before you cross that line" Brainerd knew that if the chief missed that moment, he might never be so close again. May we always strive and always live in Christ. Amen!

Fr. Jeff+