

Homily **21st Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year C** (25.8.19)

There was this lady and she was very pious on earth and she'd done all her duty as a Catholic and more besides, and she died and she went up to heaven and went to the pearly gates and went

[knock, knock, knock]

And Saint Peter opened the door and he said,

"Oh, sorry, I'd forgotten you were due to arrive today. We've got lots on at the moment - A big job on today. Could you just sit over there in the waiting room and I won't keep you long?"

So she was a bit put out, but she said,

"Okay, I will."

So she went and sat in this little waiting room, and she was there an hour.

And suddenly, thousands of angels appeared on the battlements of heaven with trumpets blazing and crowds thronged out of the door and cheered, as a big chariot with heavenly horses came forward with a Cardinal in it. And the Cardinal was waving to everybody and they were all cheering. And they went through the door, and the door shut and it was all silent.

So she was really put out and she went back on the door

[knock, knock,knock]

And Saint Peter said,

"Oh, sorry, I forgot about you."

She said,

"Look, I'm really upset. I was taught on Earth that God did not discriminate, and this Cardinal, the one who was so important in the church, you give him a fanfare, a big welcome, and I'm left in the waiting room."

Saint Peter said,

"You've got to understand, we don't get many of them in here."

[laughter]

It seems very apt for the Gospel because the Gospel is, initially it looks like an attack on status and dignity - will the people with status and dignity here on Earth have advantage over others? Will only a few be saved? But, in fact, the context in which Jesus was asked that question was a very good question by the questioner, because the context was, the Jews had just come through massive persecution, first by the Greeks who tortured them and put them to death, and then the Roman oppression. And so they hated the Gentiles. And so, this questioner was saying,

"Look, will only a few be saved?"

In other words just us who have been faithful and suffered? But Jesus is really emphasising the Isaiah prophecy in our first reading, that God's message is universal and God is the only one to judge about salvation. And there will be people from East and West and North and South; whereas those who presume on their faith may find themselves locked out if they sit on their laurels, as it were.

But the real clue in the Gospel is this: Try to enter by the narrow gate. In fact, the actual Greek word is, strive to enter by the narrow gate. And that sense of striving. Life is full, isn't it, of struggling with issues? And we apply ourselves with everyday things, with jobs, with family, with aspirations.

And Jesus is saying, by implication, apply that same tactic that you have to do with life, with life itself through baptism and you will find yourself entering through the narrow door. And baptism is a dying with Christ and joining Him three days in the tomb, symbolically, but rising with Him through grace in glory. This child we are about to baptise will have to strive in life. But if her parents teach her that striving after the greater things will reap a bigger reward, then she will know truly God as her father.