

21st Sunday in the Ordinary Time (C)

Strive to Thrive with the Lord Jesus!

Isaiah 66:18-21; Psalm 117:1,2; Hebrews 12:5-7,11-13; Luke 13:22-30

Our readings this weekend invite us to reflect deeply and prayerfully on our relationship with the Lord Jesus, which is characterized by both striving and thriving. When asked, "Lord, will only a few people be saved?" (Lk. 13:22), Jesus didn't focus on who or how many would be saved. Instead, He said, "Strive to enter through the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough" (Lk 13:24).

We are called to strive to thrive, which means making every effort with determination and discipline. The Book of Hebrews encourages us to endure our trials as a form of discipline, reminding us that God treats us as His children. After all, what child is there whose father does not discipline them? God loves us—His sons and daughters—so much that He disciplines us. This divine love guides us and assures us that discipline will shape and train us. A true disciple, who genuinely desires to become what God intends, strives to honor and glorify Him. It is a joy for disciples to strive out of gratitude for all the gifts they have received. As followers of Jesus, we are called to live for Christ every day, in all areas of our lives.

When Jesus says, "Strive to enter through the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough," He refers to Himself and His journey to Jerusalem, where He will face crucifixion. The cross fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah in our first reading, which states that God will gather people from all nations, speaking every language and tongue. God is setting a sign, and all will see and proclaim His glory.

Let us gaze upon the cross and listen to Jesus as He speaks from it: "Strive to enter through the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough." Jesus is the narrow door; He is the way. To strive means to enter through this narrow door, allowing ourselves to be exposed to the light and love of Jesus Christ. We should let His light and love guide our actions. This involves surrendering to His grace through prayer, participation in the Holy Sacraments—mainly the Holy Eucharist and Confession—relying on the Blessed Virgin Mary, and leading a life of penance and charity toward others. It is by surrendering to His grace that we will strive and thrive.

If someone chooses to hide from God's light and love, they are voluntarily making themselves obscure and impenetrable to the light of Jesus. This choice can lead to a hardening of their hearts against God's love, resulting in eternal punishment. The Gospel illustrates this outcome as being outside a locked door, where those outside plead, "Lord, open the door for us" (Luke 13:25). However, the master responds that He does not know them. Those who are cast out will endure eternal suffering, described as "wailing and grinding of teeth" (Luke 13:28). This serves as a reminder that there is a reward for our efforts. Although we may face difficulties, the ultimate result will be profound joy.

I remember the old nursery rhyme, which I think all of us remember. It teaches us at a young age to strive to thrive. The title of this nursery rhyme is Row, Row, Row Your Boat. This nursery rhyme is an imitation of the little way of our patron, St. Theresa, her way of striving to thrive with the Lord. The rhyme goes: "Row, row, row your boat gently down the stream, merrily, merrily, merrily; life is but a dream."

We strive to move our boat forward, continually progressing and thriving in life. No matter how challenging it may be, we must row our boat—our life—toward our destiny. We keep rowing and striving to do what is right and virtuous, because life is short. Life is like a dream; it slips away as soon as we wake up. Indeed, it is brief in comparison to our eternal destiny. We row our boat—our life—not with resentment, but merrily, merrily, merrily.

Fr. Manny Hewe, Pastor