

In Jesus' times, many Jews believed that in the age to come, all the people of Israel will be seated at God's Banquet. They believed that their blood and social connections, like temple worship and synagogue prayer, would lead them automatically into God's Kingdom. For the prophets the criterion was totally different. According to the prophets, people will be welcome into the Kingdom of Heaven based on how loving and mercifully they treated the most vulnerable of society. Jesus belongs to the prophetic tradition. So, when someone asks, "Lord, will only a few people be saved?" Jesus uses a parable to clarify that even though everyone is trying to get in the Banquet with God, in the midst of a traffic jam, only those who go through the narrow gate will get there. The Risen Lord is the master of the house, who locks the door. And people beg, "Lord, open the door for us." The Lord refuses because He does not know where they come from. They reply that He DOES know where they come from. They are fellow Israelites - connected by geography and blood and temple. But the Lord still insists that He does not know where they come from. "Knowing where they come from" obviously means more than being fellow Israelites. They are not righteous. The message for us is clear: We can be Baptized, Confirmed, and Married by the Church, but if we are not righteous like Jesus, if we don't love God and neighbor, we will not be welcome into God's Kingdom. The Lord will recognize as his own, only those who have their hearts set on God's love and strive to love all people.

Entering through the narrow door begins with striving. It is not easy to center our heart on love of God and neighbor. It is not easy to love people we disagree with or do not like. The poor and needy are often difficult and a challenge; some of them are illegally here. Life is a journey through the narrow gate. It is a journey of love.

Dear brothers and sisters: We also want to get into the feast of Heaven. We have done Adoration; or the 9 First Saturdays Masses; others have observed the Divine Mercy weekend with confession, Mass and Holy Communion; some of you have done pilgrimages to the Holy Land or other places. All these are wonderful and good things. But do our religious practices lead us to become a loving, mature and forgiving adult? Or are we grumpy and bitter as most people are? Do we really love the God of Jesus Christ? Do we really love our neighbor? Only divine love leads us to go through the narrow gate. It leads us to see every person of this world as a brother and a sister, as someone who deserves our best. When we know this, the Lord knows us too; and He will open the door for us. (adapted from RELENTLESS WIDOW, p. 233-234)

The narrow gate is a beautiful analogy of what we need to go through if we want to be in the Heavenly Banquet. It is a call to see how we can give our lives to something larger than our own ambitions and selfish desires. Does my faith lead me to be a peacemaker, one who forgives easily, who praises quickly, who extends compassion to all? Is our faith leading us to become more like Christ? We strive to go through the narrow gate, So God's grace may change the hardened habits of our hearts and the persistent unjust structures of society into a community more like the Kingdom of God. We go through the narrow gate when we leave behind the comforts of this world and embrace the challenging command to love one another. Only if we go through this narrow gate will the Lord recognize us and will we have the chance to be partakers of the Eternal Feast with all the saints in heaven.

The narrow gate will always lead us to touch the hearts of others with inclusive, merciful and tender love, with generous charity and with firm hope.

The Universal Prayer
Sunday 24th August 2025
Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

Celebrant:

Sisters and brothers, with hope we pray that the desire of God to gather all peoples together will unite the Church in her mission to make Jesus known everywhere.

1. That we will be united with Pope Leo in his intention for August, praying that societies will resist the temptation to confront each other for ethnic, political and religious reasons.

We pray to the Lord.

2. That the holiness of the Church, her justice and compassion, will draw people to her from east and west, from north and south.

We pray to the Lord.

3. That we will receive the grace to accept and understand our sufferings so that we will grow in peace and goodness.

We pray to the Lord.

4. That the hope of a ceasefire, the release of hostages and prisoners and the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Palestinians in the Holy Land, along with a just end to the war between Ukraine and Russia will come quickly.

We pray to the Lord.

5. That people enduring disasters caused by climate change will receive the assistance which they all desperately need.

We pray to the Lord.

6. That the Daughters of St. Mary of Guadalupe may experience and increase in vocations to religious life, so that more young and holy women may continue the ministry of this community in the Church.

We pray to the Lord.

7. That those who have passed through death will come to feast in the heavenly Jerusalem. We pray to the Lord.

We pray to the Lord.

Celebrant:

Almighty God, receive the praise of all nations, for your love is strong and you are always faithful. Through Christ our Lord.