

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (Year C)
8-24-2025 Homily

I. Introduction

Imagine a family who's spent a day at the beach or at the zoo and just returned home—only to discover they've lost or misplaced their house keys. They're locked out, and all the windows are closed—except one. The small window in the first-floor bathroom is open, but only about nine or ten inches—that's as far as it opens—and it's a good six feet off the ground. What will the family do in such a case? In all probability, the father will lift up a young son or daughter and have the child squeeze through the window and crawl inside, and then go around and unlock the back door from within, letting the rest of the family enter. This is the obvious solution; I remember having to do this for my family once or twice as a child, and perhaps some of you do, as well. In this type of situation, success comes when a child enters through a narrow way. This symbolic image or example is what Jesus is talking about in the Gospel. Following Him isn't always easy. It demands a real effort on our part; it requires that we have the heart of a child: innocent, trusting, and dependent; it demands a true commitment, as represented by our determined efforts to squeeze through the narrow window or door. Jesus offers us the gift of salvation; we must actively accept it.

II. Development

In today's Gospel someone asked Jesus, "Lord, will only a few people be saved?" The questioner was probably thinking that because the Jews were God's Chosen People, only they would be part of His Kingdom, and that all foreigners—the vast majority of the world—would be left out. Jesus, of course, explained that this was not the case; many persons from throughout the world would enter the Kingdom, whereas some of the Chosen People might be excluded through their own fault. In this, Our Lord echoed the theme of today's 1st Reading: God's people will come from every race, nation, and language.

In order for us to be part of God's Kingdom and enjoy the blessings of eternal life, we must personally and sincerely respond to Jesus. He tells us, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate"—in other words, we must make a real commitment to Him, putting Him at the very center of our lives, and focus on His will above everything else. To use an analogy: if we're trying to drive a car through a narrow passage or place, we're not going to look about at the scenery or turn around and talk to our passengers in the back seat; we're going to focus our attention on our driving and on the need to squeeze through safely. Jesus wants us to give that same type of attention and priority to our responsibility of accepting the salvation He offers.

Many people try to use a broader approach; they might say, "Well, yes, I'm a Christian, but I don't have a lot of time for religion, or things like prayer and attending church, because I'm active in this, responsible for that, caught up in this event, interested or involved in those things, and busy with so many other possibilities and aspects of life." If faith gets pushed aside this way, it becomes harder and harder to find the narrow gate leading to salvation—and if we're not careful, we might end up like those people Jesus warns about in the Gospel, who claimed to know Him but really didn't know Him at all. To their great surprise and distress, they were locked out of God's Kingdom, and they had no one to blame but themselves.

III. Conclusion

In 1937 the great American animator and film maker Walt Disney decided to make a feature animated film out of the classic fairy tale Snow White. When it was released the following year, it became an instant classic, and is today considered one of the greatest films ever made; it ushered in what has been called the “golden age of animated movies.” However, not every scene made it into the final version. One of Disney’s most skilled artists or animators spent 240 work days drawing hundreds of slightly different pictures in order to create a 4 ½ minute sequence for the movie; in this highly complex scene, the Seven Dwarves unleashed chaos in their kitchen, blundering and bustling about, and getting in each other’s way, while trying to make soup for Snow White as their guest. Walt Disney thought the scene was very funny, and appreciated the great skill involved in creating it—but he decided this sequence interrupted the flow of the movie, so he ruthlessly and decisively decided it had to be eliminated (Craig Brian Larson, *750 Engaging Illustrations*, p. 559).

Jesus wants us to be just as single-hearted when it comes to following Him. With all the diversions and distractions our society offers, it’s very easy to lose sight of what’s truly important—and so we sometimes have to be reminded. The 2nd Reading from the Letter to the Hebrews states that God disciplines us as a loving Father to “make straight paths for [our] feet”—in other words, to help us find the narrow door or gate leading to eternal life. Many times suffering can be a necessary reminder of how much we truly need the Lord. It’s far easier on us, however, if we never lose sight of the truth in the first place—and this is also God’s preference. Following the right path and entering through the narrow gate or way demands that we spend some time in prayer each day; we have to “touch base” with God, seeking His guidance and His blessing upon our efforts. We also have to experience and share His presence through being part of a worshipping community; this means coming to Mass each weekend, regularly receiving the Sacraments, and supporting our parish through our contributions and involvement. We must also try to live according to God’s values: seeing people as more important than things, being willing to ask for and extend forgiveness, not letting ourselves get caught up in the false standards of the world, being honest and respectful in our dealings with others, and placing God’s will ahead of our own.

Sticking to the “straight and narrow” way isn’t always an easy thing, but it’s certainly worth the effort. We must have the heart of a child; we must squeeze through the temptations and false values of life, thus following the path Jesus has shown us. God offers the gift of salvation to people of every time and place—including our own; it is up to us to accept. The Lord has done His part; now we must do ours.