

TWENTY FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, 2025.

“STRIVE TO ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW GATE, FOR MANY, I TELL YOU, WILL SEEK TO ENTER AND NOT BE ABLE” (LUKE 13:24)

This passage from today's Gospel reading is a reminder of the serious, demanding, and challenging side of the Christian Religion established by our Lord, Jesus Christ. Now, the Christian Religion has another side, brighter and more comfortable. Both are equally true, and equally necessary. The whole truth of Christianity embraces both the fact of our desperate moral and spiritual danger, and the fact of God's merciful love for us. God's merciful love promises Salvation for all who are willing to accept God's gift of Faith and to cooperate with the working of God's Grace in performing Good Works. To accept Faith and to cooperate with God's Grace require a certain kind of discipline. We cannot believe whatever we feel like believing, We must believe the word of Faith. We cannot do whatever we want to do. We must do the works of Charity. As today's second reading, from the Epistle to the Hebrews, observes, “It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?” (Hebrews 12: 7).

The Lord Jesus guarantees that if, by His Grace, we believe in His word and obey His teachings, we will pass through the narrow gate. Nonetheless, the gate is narrow. Not by believing any old word but by believing HIS word will we pass through. Not by doing whatever we feel like doing, but by doing the good works HE has prepared for us and put in front of us will we pass through.

Our ancient enemy, the devil, seeks to oppose the Christian Religion in many ways. One way is by producing counterfeit Christianities. One counterfeit Christianity is ALL mystery, inexorable justice, and, above all, FEAR. In authentic Christianity, there is some mystery, justice and, yes, fear, but there is much more. There is joy and, above all, LOVE. As the Lord helps us acquire spiritual wisdom, we can recognize this first counterfeit Christianity by its lack of LOVE.

The other counterfeit Christianity, rather more common, perhaps, in our day and age, is ALL comfort, unquestioning mercy, and, above all, TOLERANCE. In authentic Christianity there is comfort, mercy, and, yes, tolerance, but there is much more. There is also iron determination, and, especially, dedication to TRUTH. As the Lord helps us acquire spiritual wisdom, we can recognize this second counterfeit Christianity by its lack of seriousness about TRUTH.

I hasten to add that many people somewhat affected by this second counterfeit are, at heart, sincere Christians. Still, without realizing it, they are starting to drift away from the Gospel. They celebrate and try to have several qualities of Gospel Religion, but they also ignore and even despise other qualities of Gospel Religion. Rightly, they strive to be empathetic, courteous, kind, and tactful. On other hand, they do not stand in awe of almighty God, they not burn with zeal to give Him glory, they do not hate sin, they are not horrified by sight of someone falling into mortal sin, they are not angry at blasphemy, they are not concerned to be correct about Christian doctrine, they are not earnest about correct morals, and they see no value in loyalty to Christ's Church. To sum it up in one word, they lack seriousness.

“Strive to enter through the narrow gate”. Be serious about your Christianity.

To that image of the narrow gate, the Lord Jesus adds “Many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough.” There is no way to build up physical strength without serious work. There is no way to build up spiritual strength without serious work. The Lord, Who inspires, accompanies, and guides all good work, guarantees that if we do the work, we will

force open the gate. The power to do so is His. As we work with Him, He shares it with us. We must, however, work with Him. We dare not do nothing, sitting complacently in sin and repeating over and over that God is merciful.

“I do not know where you are from. Depart from me, you evildoers.” (Luke 13:27) Don’t be afraid, the second counterfeit says, because God is merciful. The second counterfeit fails to recall that God is also just. He is eager to forgive our sins, but He insists that we must reject our sins and break from them. All of the sins of our past He forgives, through the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ; but, if we dare to use that very Sacrifice as an excuse to still living in sin, we add blasphemy to our other sins, and risk eternal damnation. Get serious, the Lord says, and reject your sins today. He does not ask for guarantees about tomorrow, but He does ask for effort today. Inspired and helped by His Grace, are we willing to fight our sins today?

There really is need in the Church for more fighting spirit. To be more like Gospel Christianity, today’s Catholic Christianity needs to be more fierce. What I call for is not fierceness against any particular human beings, but fierceness against sin. The old saying always holds that we should love the sinner (including ourselves) but hate sins (including our own). HATE sins! Counterfeit Christianity #2 lacks this, but authentic Christianity is strongly marked by it. Even as we proclaim mercy to the sinner, we must show our hatred for the sin. This is why public sins must be publicly punished, and why people who have committed grave, deeply harmful, particularly vile sins cannot be given positions of public honor. Their sins can be forgiven in Christ, and by Christ’s work they can attain Eternal Life, but we must demonstrate our fierce hatred of sin by not allowing them the same public honors that we give to consistently loyal workers in the Lord’s vineyard. Quite candidly, the Church’s self-inflicted humiliation of the clergy abuse scandals had partly to do with forgetting that. A life of quiet penance yes - restoration to a position of public honor and trust, no. Indeed, much of what has ailed the Church in recent decades shows the effects of Counterfeit Christianity #2, in which a smiling face and forgiveness are taken as the entire essence of Christianity, as though the Lord Jesus had never said anything about striving to enter through the narrow gate or being strong enough to force open the heavy door.

I do not want to end harshly, but I do want to emphasize the need to be serious in our Christianity. We dare not take our Salvation for granted, such that we live habitually in sin without fear of consequences.

On the other hand, the Gospels make it clear that God desires our Salvation. They make it clear that Jesus Christ has died to wash our sins, and has risen to lift us up into Eternal Life. We must fear what will happen to us if we do not cooperate with our Lord Jesus Christ. At the same time, we must be joyfully confident about what will happen to us if we do cooperate with our Lord Jesus Christ.

With the Lord Jesus’ help, may we be serious in our Christianity, doing penance for past sins and avoiding occasions of future sin, even as we put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and look forward to enjoying the happy eternity He has won for us.