

Fr. Romeo Evangelista Homily
Sunday, August 21, 2022
21st Sunday in Ordinary Time
Cycle C

In this book *The Holy Land*, John Kellman describes a field pen which consists of a circular stone wall about four feet high with an opening in it. Kellman says that one day a Holy Land tourist saw a field pen and asked a shepherd sitting nearby, “Where’s the gate for your pen?”. The shepherd said, “***I am the gate.***” The shepherd then told the tourist how he herded his flock into the pen each night. Then he would lay down across the narrow entrance. No sheep could leave the pen, and no wild animals could enter it, without stepping on his body.

My dear friends, this anecdote will help us understand and appreciate today’s gospel passage, in which Jesus uses the metaphor of **gate** – narrow gate: “Strive to enter through the narrow gate.”

Maybe the question is: Why enter the ‘gate’ and why is the gate ‘narrow’?

We know that in St. John’s Gospel there are so-called “**I AM statements**” that Jesus makes.

For example, for when He said:

- “I AM the Light of the World.”
- “I AM the Bread of Life.”
- “I AM the Good Shepherd.”
- “I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life.
- “I AM the Vine...”
- “I AM the Resurrection and the Life.”

One that is now well known is “**I AM the Gate.**” Remember Jesus talking about the sheepfold – which is a symbol for the kingdom of God – and him making the statement: “*I am the Gate.*”

The sheep enter the sheepfold through the gate. **What Jesus means by the statement, “I AM the Gate” is that “I am the way IN.” “I am the way IN.” “No one gets IN the kingdom of God except through ME.”**

What Jesus is telling each one of us is this: “Strive to enter into the life of salvation, by entering through me, by configuring yourself with Jesus, by conforming your life to Him.”

With God’s grace, we have to make ourselves more into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ. That’s what we are. That’s why we call ourselves Christians. Salvation means living in accord with Jesus Christ. It means becoming a person of love, like Jesus.

We know it is one of the greatest challenges we can have in our lives because following the ways of Jesus sometimes, is really hard. There is no easy way. That’s why as Christians we need to strive to conform ourselves to the way of Jesus Christ. It is in loving the way Jesus loves – loving not only those who are easy to love but even those who are difficult to love, the seemingly unlovable and unloving people.

It means becoming a person of compassion, like Jesus.

It is being moved to compassion like Jesus, feeling the hurts and pains of others, allowing them to move us to do something for those who are suffering and afflicted.

It means becoming a person of forgiveness, like Jesus.

It is being able to forgive like Jesus Christ on the cross when he said: “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

Brothers & sisters, this is what it means to be conformed to Christ. Not an easy task to take. That is why most of the time we are all tempted to take the easy paths. How I wish salvation could be attained instantly or easily. When you have faith, you are saved. That’s it. But God said no. Faith without works is dead. That’s why we have need to work for salvation. We can’t have instant salvation. But sometimes all of us want the easy way. Even I myself, sometimes am tempted to do it the easy way. Sometimes that’s who we are. We want an easy way. That’s why in our world today we lose the sense of sacrifice. Even with a little sacrifice sometimes we grumble – we grumble before God – “Lord, where is the answer to my prayers?” We can’t wait a little bit. Salvation is not like that. We need to work for our salvation. If faith is enough maybe we don’t need to go to mass every Sunday but God said we need to work for our salvation. The narrow path that is laid for us.

But God's path is rarely easy.

That is why the Lord Jesus encourages us to take the narrow path, the more difficult one, which is also the one that leads to life. Jesus does not sugarcoat the demands of God's kingdom.

Those who wish to enter it must strive to enter through the narrow gate. The narrow gate Jesus is referring to is the way of self-sacrifice, the way of self-giving, the way of love –and indeed, the way of Christ himself.

It is the way of Jesus, the way that led him to the Cross, the way of self-giving love.

This is what we are called for. If we want to truly achieve great things in our Christian faith then maybe the best question that we need to ask ourselves is: "Have we truly loved the way our Lord Jesus loves us?" If people ask me how many people will be saved? My answer would be It depends. It depends on how many of us have truly strived to love the way Jesus loved.

Amen.

Link to the Mass: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUoD5E0pKGM>

Fr. Romeo's homily is at 23:57.