

Today's opening prayer gives us an inspiring spirit for this weekend's liturgy. We prayed: "Father help us to seek the values that will bring us lasting joy in this changing world." That is what the prophet Isaiah wanted his hearers to have when he told them he wanted them to see God's glory. That is what Paul wanted the Hebrew people to have as he told them in the second reading that they should accept the discipline that is the teaching of Jesus. Perhaps he had in mind Jesus' strong teaching that we heard in today's Gospel.

On that occasion Jesus was teaching his favorite subject, the kingdom and salvation which constitutes membership in God's kingdom. While doing so, a question was put to Jesus about whether many or few are to be saved. That was really a question about who really belongs.

Jesus side stepped the question about numbers, saying in effect that numbers are not the issue. He was saying that the issue was helping all people to do what was needed to get into the kingdom. He wanted no one to lose out. Jesus wasn't just trying to make life difficult for people by using the image of getting through a narrow door. You can't get into a narrow opening if you are carrying a lot of excess baggage. What is the unnecessary baggage now preventing you from getting on board on the journey to eternal life? What is some of the excess baggage now loading you down? Is it your anger or the way you treat others? How are you now using your time? Do you waste too much of it watching TV? Is your wealth or your tongue an obstacle? How about your pride, vanity or self-centered ways or other bad habits?

As we seek to follow Christ faithfully, it has crossed the mind of each of us at various times wondering: Is God expecting more of me than I am already doing? That question crossed the mind of people in Jesus day also. In our Gospel when Jesus was asked: Are they few in number who are saved? He did not answer with a simple yes or no statement.

If Jesus had answered the question by saying: Only a few will be saved, it would have shaken people too badly. Since many usually underestimate the quality of their lives, they might have given up saying: I don't have a chance. or Why pray and do all those good deeds if I would never be welcomed into heaven anyway?

On the other hand if Jesus had said: The number of the saved includes everybody, many would have said: "Since we are already guaranteed immediate room reservation in the kingdom of heaven, then why not eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we'll have the best seat in heaven."

Instead of leading us to despair that we won't make it or to presuming that nothing will stop us from getting to heaven. he gave a positive statement. He said:"Come in through the narrow door; that is, be prepared to make the best effort of preparation that you can.

We ought not judge our future by what our past has been like. Beginning with today, our future is still to be determined. May we try as best we can to do as Jesus asks.

The idea is that the way is narrow not because God made it that way so that only a few could pass through it. Rather it is narrow because we make it that way by our own attachments, our doubts and deeds.

One of the most famous photos taken in World War II show four marines planting the American flag on Mt Surabachi on the island of Iwo Jima. The photo was taken by Joe Rosenthal just after the Marines had driven the enemy from this strategic location on the mountain.

The photographer who took the picture braved mine fields and machine gun fire to take that famous picture.

He was no stranger to courage. He had been a Jew who became convinced that Jesus was not only the promised Messiah but also the Son of God. After that he became a Catholic. His family and friends fought his decision, because they thought he was making a mistake. So to do what was right he had to go against their wishes. He loved them so deeply, so it was a painful task to follow his conscience.

When newspapers and magazines printed his prize winning photo, everyone wanted to know more about the man who took that photo. In the interview he told the journalist that "the day before he went on Iwo Jima he attended Mass and received Holy Communion." Then referring to his conversion to Catholicism he said: "If a man is genuinely convinced he has the truth and still neglects it, he is a traitor, and that goes for my Catholic friends who miss Mass on Sunday."

The door is narrow, not because God made it that way but because of

us. Our material possessions, our concerns, fearing what others many think or say, & not including the Lord in our priorities are some of the things that prevent us from being faithful followers of Jesus.

Everything and everyone is not perfect in the world. But there are many people around us to inspire us to greater goodness of life. No one said that being a follower of Jesus would be easy. Like someone said: We are made for better, not for easier. We pray that the Lord will help us to live our lives in such a way so we personally inspire one another to greater goodness. For a few moments reflect on how you will do so.

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