

**Sermon for the 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)**  
on August 23<sup>rd</sup>/ 24<sup>rd</sup> 2025 in St Sebastian's Cathedral

Luke 13:22–30

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## **A Narrow Door, or: Why You Must Choose Love**

From the Gospel according to Luke:

*<sup>22</sup>He passed through towns and villages, teaching as he went and making his way to Jerusalem. <sup>23</sup>Someone asked him, "Lord, will only a few people be saved?" He answered them, <sup>24</sup>"Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough. <sup>25</sup>After the master of the house has arisen and locked the door, then will you stand outside knocking and saying, 'Lord, open the door for us.' He will say to you in reply, 'I do not know where you are from.' <sup>26</sup>And you will say, 'We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets.' <sup>27</sup>Then he will say to you, 'I do not know where (you) are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!' <sup>28</sup>And there will be wailing and grinding of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves cast out. <sup>29</sup>And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God. <sup>30</sup>For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."*

*Someone asked him, "Lord, will only a few people be saved?"  
(Luke 13:23)*

One might almost think the question is: Lord, please tell me – do I have a chance? And the question seems driven by fear, whether I will be redeemed by God; whether I will be accepted by God. Presumably, the person asking Jesus has been listening carefully. What Jesus says is a serious matter. And that makes him uncertain.

Jesus answers this anxious question with an appeal:

*"Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough. (Luke 13:24)*

And the forecast Jesus gives here is very serious. Strive now, because soon it might be too late. You might have to stand outside the door:

*And there will be wailing and grinding of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves cast out. (Luke 13:28)*

So is the kingdom of heaven, if things don't go so well, only for a few chosen ones? Some who are especially good Christians?

Dear brothers and sisters,

at this point it might seem like Christianity – following Jesus – is a competitive sport. Only a few make it through this door by fulfilling the requirements. Those who don't – must stay outside.

The evangelist Luke shares this dramatic episode for two reasons. First, he wants to draw attention to the urgency: It's about commitment, now! At the same time, he explains why, in this new Christian community, alongside only some members of the people of Israel, many people from other nations from north and south, east and west will be included. And he cloaks this in these challenging images of the narrow door, at which some may fail; of the banquet from which some are excluded.

But what does this mean for us, for you and me?

Why do we set out to follow Christ? To push ourselves perfectly through this one door? Because we're afraid of being left outside? Because we want to belong to the chosen, who are allowed to sit at the table?

A desert father, an ancient monk – Abbas Chaeremon – said that fear, the fear of hell – of being left outside – is one possible path, but he would not recommend it. Likewise, the hope for a reward in the kingdom of heaven – being inside – is also a possible path,

but he wouldn't recommend that either. Abbas Chaeremon knew that people can be motivated to live faithfully by fear and hope for reward. And you and I must honestly ask ourselves whether at least a spark of that motivation is not also hidden somewhere in us. These motives exist, and they are deeply human. But – and this is what the Abbas highlights – fear and reward only work for a very short time; as soon as the threat or the reward is no longer in sight, the effort will fade. It's not sustainable.

The desert father knew a third way, which he urgently recommends: Choose love! Set out on this path out of love for God, out of love for your neighbour. Because, says the Abbas, if you walk the path out of love, then love will shape you – then your way of life, your effort to be a disciple will more and more become your own. It will become your habitus; it will define your being. And, carried by love, you can walk toward God.

I admit, that sounds easier than it is. Because living love is challenging. And I believe that carrying love through ups and downs, through good and bad times, through health and illness, is sometimes a narrow, arduous path. So perhaps the image of the narrow door fits.

But the monastic tradition of an Abbas Chaeremon also knows that striving for love changes people. The transformation happens within, in our hearts, in yours and mine: It widens the heart. Living in love makes you free on the inside, so that you no longer need to live your life in fear or with a vague hope of reward. Because love is a gift from God. In love, God accepts you! Love makes you free and spurs you on to race with a wide heart through that narrow door.

Love then makes you generous, ready to share it with others. Because love is the sign of Jesus, by it you recognize him. And he recognizes you by it!

So: Choose love!

What, however, cannot be spared: You yourself have to become active. The comfort zone – you and I – we must leave behind and become people shaped and marked by love. That's how he will recognize you. If you live love, how could he say: "I don't know where you're from." So don't be afraid, live love.

Dear siblings, perhaps tonight you might want to consider what step could help you live love. Picture something concrete. Imagine something that comes easily to you and that you can do well. And then do that act of love you've considered. Whether it's in your family, your circle of friends, at work – it doesn't matter where, as long as it's something realistic for you. Then strive with all your strength to live this sign of love.

Choose love – it will change you.

By Deacon Thomas

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