

Father O'Connor's Homily for 24 August 2025
Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time-C

Isaiah 66: 18-21
Hebrews 12: 5-7, 11-13
Luke 13: 22-30

Someone asked Jesus an age-old question in today's Gospel, "Lord, will only a few people be saved?" And He answered, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough."

A writer diagrammed Jesus' response this way. Think about a triangle without a base – like a teepee – and that open space at the bottom is a door that is very wide. You can enter quite easily, but the further you get in, the more confined you are. It looks like it offers absolute freedom, but once inside your freedom is seriously limited.

That same writer then said that if we think about what Jesus is teaching us in today's Gospel, the diagram would look like a "V" with a very narrow entrance at its base. It is difficult to get in, but possible. And once you get in, the promises and possibilities are immensely widened.

The door to heaven is a narrow one. "Strive to enter through the narrow gate," Jesus teaches us.

Many students – and families – are going back to school this time of year. Education is a narrow gate. If you had a wonderful summer, the temptation might be to skip school and to prolong the leisure. But where would that lead you in the long run?

"Enter through the narrow gate." Go to school and work hard. Seize the opportunities that come your way. Don't just get by. Strive to excel, using all of your abilities. It will pay off by opening wide the possibilities for your future.

Then, when you have completed your formal education, having gone through the narrow gate, if you still want to work for a minimum wage, you certainly can! But there are lots of other choices that you will be able to make. Education is a narrow gate, and it pays off.

Physical fitness is a narrow gate. That may be an unexpected topic to bring up in church. But God made our bodies as well as our souls. And one day these bodies of ours that will die are going to be re-united with our souls

when they are raised up in glory, as we profess in the last line of the Creed every Sunday: “And I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.” The Lord expects us to take proper care of our bodies – not over-indulging them, not neglecting them, but always respecting them.

Someone said that his original goal in life was to have a body that looked like a Greek god. But later on in life he ended up looking more like a Greek restaurant! Yes, neglect takes its toll.

Saint Augustine teaches us: “Take care of your body as if you were going to live forever. And take care of your soul as if you were going to die tomorrow.”

Our vocations, our callings in life, involve a narrow gate. Whether called to single life or married life, whether to the ordained or the consecrated religious life, we make choices along the way that eliminate other possibilities.

My mother became a widow with six children at the age of 45. A few years later, when I was a very young priest, I remember a conversation that we had one evening in the living room. She was telling me that being single again was not what she had in mind at this time in her life. Wanting to encourage her, I drew from what I thought was my storehouse of wisdom as a newly-ordained priest, and I said, “Mom, we both have something in common now. We are both called to live celibate lives.” To which she quickly shot back, “Timothy, always remember that you are celibate by choice. I am celibate by circumstances. And there is a great deal of difference between us.” [I have never forgotten the wisdom that she shared with me that evening.]

Sometimes the choices that we make involve how we accept something that is handed to us, something that we did not wish for, like being single in life by circumstances – by a death or by a divorce or by the right person to marry not turning up.

Do I choose to make the most of a situation that I did not wish for, or do I choose to live a life of bitterness and regret? How do I make the most of my life, right where I am now with, of course, the grace of God? “Strive to enter through the narrow gate,” Jesus teaches us.

A little girl had a doll collection. She was asked which one was her favorite. She went to her room and came out with a doll that even Goodwill might have rejected. Most of the hair had come off, one eye was missing and the dress was tattered.

When she was asked why this one was her favorite, she answered: “Because if I don’t love this dolly, nobody will.”

Well, not a single one of us is outside of God’s circle of love. “God loves each of us as though there were only one of us to love,” as Saint Augustine wrote.

God wants every one of us to be with Him in heaven one day. And He gives us the grace we need to get there through the Passion, Death and Resurrection of His Son, Jesus. But God has also given us the gift of free will. We must choose to enter through the narrow gate, and we must renew that choice every day.

The narrow gate leads to abundant life whether we are talking about education or physical fitness or our callings or any worthwhile thing. And the most important of those narrow gates is the one that leads to heaven.

“Strive to enter through the narrow gate,” Jesus teaches us. And we will be blessed with abundant life here and hereafter.