

August 21, 2022 – The Narrow Door (21st Sunday in Ordinary Time)
Gospel of Luke 13:22-30
Fr. John

Groucho Marx, the oldest of the comedic team of the Marx brothers of Hollywood film fame of an earlier era, once remarked: 'I would never want to belong to a club that would have **me** as a member!'

This self deprecating humour however had a dark undertone to it. Marx was Jewish and had probably been the object of discrimination himself by a number of exclusive clubs and organizations.

Exclusivity is what Jesus addresses himself to in today's gospel reading when he responds to the question: 'Lord will only a few be saved?'

When Jesus responds - speaking about the narrow door and how many will be locked out, it sends cold chills down our spines. There are even branches of Christianity that claim that only 144,000 will be saved out of the billions of human beings that have ever populated the earth.

But Jesus wasn't in the 'numbers game'. He was making the point that those who had the attitude of entitlement simply because they conformed to the outward appearances of faith will be in for a big surprise when all is said and done.

The entire message of the gospel is about loving God and our neighbour as ourselves [as Jesus summarized it]. He didn't say it depended how and how many outward religious rituals we performed or who we claimed to know.

Perhaps the person who posed the question to Jesus was himself a member of an elite religious group who was only too anxious to certify his presumed 'reserved seat' in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus' response however was **not** to be an ultimate prediction of how many would get into heaven but rather a warning about presumptive attitudes. The 'narrow door', that he alludes to, is representative of that part of life in which pain and suffering are components. And these are difficult to get through.

So how **do** we squeeze through?

The answer is maybe not one that you might expect. It doesn't even involve the religious clichés that we might expect to hear.

If you recall, this past Lent, Fr. Brad and I used the 12 Twelve Step program of AA as the basis of our homilies concerning conversion. The first two steps of that process are stated as follows:

- We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol - and that our lives had become unmanageable.
- We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Notice that neither of these statements mention God or religion but rather, 'A Power greater than ourselves' and 'sanity'. Therefore even people of a non-faith background are included. [Did not Jesus mention that even religious outsiders will eat in the Kingdom of God].

Therefore, the primary key to get through that narrow door is the virtue of Humility. And Humility [as the old saying goes] is **not** thinking less of ourselves but rather thinking of ourselves **less**. In other words, we have to check our egos at the door in order to pass through.

We don't need to necessarily be dealing with an addiction or a disease like alcoholism in order to appreciate the wisdom of those statements. But we all deal with the darker side of our personal egos and the difficulty we have in handing things over and admitting that we can't control everything.

Yes it is difficult to pass through that narrow door. It takes a lot of discipline to peel back the self-centred luggage that prevents us from entering. But, as the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us: 'discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.'

Perhaps it's the 'church of **self**-righteousness' that I wouldn't want to be a member of either.