

21st SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Luke 13:22-30

Imagine a tight-rope walker balancing atop a wire no thicker than a man's thumb and trying to walk from one side to the other over a deep cavern and using nothing but his own senses and a pole to balance himself. A successful tight-rope walker knows that his centre of mass or centre of gravity must be directly over the wire. If that centre of mass shifts to the right or the left of the wire, then he will fall.

At the time of our Lord's life on earth Jewish religion was dominated by the thinking of the Pharisees. They taught that very few people would gain eternal life. In our culture the opposite view prevails and says that, for the most part, people are basically good and so we should not concern ourselves with whether or not we are saved because everybody is going to Heaven. But what does the Lord say? When questioned by someone, we know not who—maybe it was a wife who had just lost her husband or a mother who had just lost her child—the Lord does not say that only a few shall be saved, as did the Pharisees, nor does he say that many or all will be saved, as does today's culture. Instead, he says that we must strive to enter through the narrow gate.

The verb "to strive" in English comes from the Greek word *agonizomai* from which we get the English word "agony." That is, "to strive" means "to agonise." So did the Lord mean that we must "agonise" to enter the Kingdom of Heaven? The word was used in the Greek, in which the New Testament is written, to mean things like hand-to-hand combat, to describe the contests of their games (like the Olympic Games), to mean "to make every effort" or "to do the best." For us the word "agony" is most closely associated with Christ's agony in the garden of Gethsemane the night before His crucifixion. There in the garden as He knew that His death was coming and as He sweated blood He

prayed to the Father that He would be freed from the torment of death. But He prayed also that the Father's will, not His own, be done. In the torture of anticipation as He knew the horrors that awaited Him the Lord knew what it meant to strive to enter through the narrow door. The narrow door was His passion and death which would effect the forgiveness of sins of all men and women, but He strived, He agonised, to enter through that door.

Our faith is difficult. The Blessed Virgin Mary knew that, and she knows it still. In her life she strived to understand the great promises of God amidst the turmoil of her life. Her life was marked by the tumult of grace and sin. She was told by an angel that she would be the mother of the son of God but then she faced the hoards who wanted to stone her to death for "adultery". She was promised that her son would be the one to set Israel free, but then she with her son and St. Joseph are forced to flee and live as refugees in Egypt. She was promised that her son would be the one to give people life but then she stands at the foot of the Cross and watches her son die.

Apathy and political correctness have become the tools of the Devil and have robbed us of the beauty of our faith that meant we gave our all to follow Christ, just as He gave and continues to give to us His all.

Demands are made on children and teenagers in school that say that they get must get the best grades possible if they are to succeed in the world. Demands on athletes are made that mean if they are successful they are hailed as heroes but if they do less than is expected they are vilified as traitors. I demand that nobody offend me and if they do they must be made to apologise, but I do not make the same demands on myself. But our faith is treated without regard to the drama of life. We should stand up boldly for our faith and for our holy mother, the Church. We should profess loudly and clearly the faith that has been given us by Christ and handed on by the Apostles unchanged through the centuries. We should seek to make that faith known and, importantly, to live it in our own lives without compromise.

The Lord said that we must strive to enter by the narrow gate. Just like the tight-rope walker we are perched on a narrow wire and to ensure that we do not fall we must place our centre of mass over the wire. We have our senses, the God-given gifts of our nature and we have our balancing pole, the grace of the Sacraments that build upon our nature and perfect it. The worst thing we can do to our faith is to presume upon the life that Christ makes possible for us.