

## Homily for the 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday, August 21

Many of us can remember the delightful film shorts of yesteryear featuring three knuckleheads, Mo, Larry and Curly, otherwise known as the Three Stooges. In one of their amusing scenes, often repeated, finds the three standing outside a door hoping to enter. When they finally receive permission to do so the three men, clearly impatient, attempt to squeeze through the doorway at the same time, resulting in frustration. In a rage, Mo cries out, “spread out”. Mo is the first to pass through the doorway followed by Larry and Curly. Although the door was not narrow, the three stooges, in a moment of foolishness, narrowed the door which only one or two people could pass through together, and at the same time, without issue. For a brief moment it was impossible for the three of them to enter through the narrow door.

In his last journey to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, someone, likely a Jew, asked Jesus a question. “Lord, will only a few people be saved?” In other words, he wants to know who has a share in the life to come. Who has access to the reign of God?

Among the teachers of Israel in Jesus’ day, it was a hotly debated question. Who will be saved? The whole of humanity? Israel, to the exclusion of all the other nations? Or only the righteous among the Chosen People?

Jesus does not offer a direct answer. Instead, he makes reference to a narrow door. Why is the door narrow? It is largely because the life of a disciple of Jesus is demanding, and requires commitment, self-discipline and dedication.

The life of a Christian is an intense struggle. Entry into the kingdom can never be automatic, but is the reward of a struggle. The word translated as striving in today’s gospel is the word from which the English word agony is derived.

The Lutheran Pastor and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, often spoke derisively of “cheap grace”. It was his commentary on the Christian who seeks all the consolations of faith without commitment or conversion.

Several years ago Pope Francis visited a parish in Rome, and engaged the children in a question and answer session. A young boy, Emmanuel, wanted to know if his father, recently deceased and one who died without the gift of faith, was in heaven. Though an unbeliever, he had all four of his sons baptized.

When the time came to ask the question, the boy burst into tears and could not speak.

The Pope asked the children to think what God is like and, especially, what kind of heart he has.

“God has a father’s heart”, the pope explained. “And with a dad who was not a believer, but who had his children baptized and was a good man, God is merciful. “Do you think God would be able to leave him far from Himself? Does God abandon his children when they are good?”

What would have been our response to the boy?

We should leave to God the question of who will go to heaven. Surely it is not a question for us to answer. Only the Good Lord has 20/20 vision into the soul of each and every person.

The door to heaven is only narrow for those whose way of life makes it exceedingly difficult to pass through. For those who live the faith, the door is expansive. Crossing the threshold is much easier for the ones who follow Jesus unconditionally.

The name on the door is Jesus.