

"Lord will only a few people be saved?" How many will be saved? A most difficult question and one that is most difficult to answer. But If I were to ask you...every answer under the sun would be represented in the room. From everyone goes to heaven, to a few go to heaven, to well most go but only after a long stay in purgatory, to almost everyone goes to hell (as in the Fatima prophecy—People are falling in to hell like leaves off a tree)! The discussion would go on for a long time and we would be passionate in our thoughts. Because with each argument we can find scriptural reference to back us up. And we can find a saint, who describe every point of view as well.

The truth of the question is: We just don't know!!!!

In today's gospel, the person asking the question is a Jew addressing a respected Rabbi. And of course (according to the Jew asking the question) he know the answer is "the few!" The chosen people who live the law, who are born of a chosen people and who are righteous will surely get in!

As Catholics we can fall into that same presumption. After all, we are the ones who have been chosen, Jesus says "You did not chose me, no I chose you", we follow the rules, we share in table fellowship, we are "Catholic", surely we are in!!!

Is that enough? We can sometimes believe that is enough – but not for Jesus. Remember Jesus wants followers not admires!

Instead of playing the numbers game, answering the question about how many are to be saved, Jesus deflects the questioner's inquiry. **Forget about how many will be on the final guest list for the banquet, look instead to your own quality of discipleship.**

Jesus says we are to "strive" to enter through the narrow gate. From the Greek for "strive," ("Agonizesthe") **we get our word "agony."** This gives us a sense of what effort will be involved to get through that gate. The word could be applied to a **strenuous athletic effort, the energy, pain and dedication athletes put into competition like the Olympics.** It has been a "narrow gate" indeed for them.

Jesus calls his disciples to such efforts on behalf of the reign of God. So the narrow gate is not so much a "Gate" as it is "The Way".

The way is the Cross, (of which Jesus is preparing us for on the Way to Jerusalem in lesson #9) and the same "Agony", "agony" is used to describe the events of the Passion...beginning with the "Agony in the Garden".

I few years ago I walked the *Via della Rosa* to Golgatha in the Holy Land, the journey literally is a narrow way. The path to Golgatha, is thru narrow streets that, at times, seemed like one could stretch our your arms and touch the walls on both sides of the street. Such is the Way of the Cross, the Way of Discipleship.

And while the "Way" is narrow, the call and invitation is not! Today's Isaiah and gospel readings show how inclusive is God's saving outreach. We may have our notions of who is "in" and who is "out"; who is worthy and who is not—the gospel cautions us not to jump to conclusions and not to be smug.

What kind of logic and world are we being invited into when the first are last and the last first? That's certainly not the world to which we are accustomed. Of course not, it is an entirely new world-- a new way of reasoning, judging, rewarding and giving entrance. In fact, the gospel suggests we put our math and standards in storage and let God be God when it comes to who will have admission through gate. "For 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." Lk 13

While the way or door is narrow, God's mercy is wide!!!!

And so Jesus teaches that there are no haves and have nots. He wants to have the whole world come in...but not because of priveledge, we ate and drank with you, you taught us on the streets and in our Churches. But because we chose to follow him in the way and the Agonezithe, embracing the cross of obidence and selfless service.

Because God's mercy is wide, we too must be open to all, "from the east and the west, and from the north and the south," for those who are good, no matter what their background, will be invited to dine with Jesus and the great ancestors of faith, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

It is why we exist as a parish, to offer the narrow way to everyone who are in this room and beyond our doors! For we are not a social club with exclusive membership, we are a community of believers who must share the good news of

all that has been given to us, through the wide mercy of our Savior Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father.

It is why we have built the building, not for our own comfort, but to be a beacon of Christ's love and invitation to a banquet that is life itself!

In 2019, just one year after beginning the parish, we decided it was time to prepare for a permanent home to be built on the land provided by the Archdiocese of Mobile.

Today we have this beautiful "beacon" sitting on some 27 acres of land! It is almost universal that parishioners and visitors say, this is way more than we imagined as far as its beauty and significance. God has been good to us, as you have been very good and generous to this new parish we lovingly know as BFXS.

From the beginning there has been a whole lot of enthusiasm, the initial parishioner loved the idea of starting something new and building something out of nothing. Well, we did just that!

4 years ago, the Archbishop trusted and commissioned me as the first pastor to begin a parish. We had nothing, not a pot or pan, not a book for mass or a computer. We had nothing. Today, just four years later we have a parish rectory, a brand-new building complete with beautiful sanctuary/hall, kitchen, classroom, new chalices and vestments. For my part it is amazing to see what God and we can do!

This was accomplished because some 200 families stepped up and pledged some 1.4 million dollars.

The archbishop was so impressed that he took a risk and allowed us to build, because of the need and immense growth in Spanish Fort.

In four short years, we have more than doubled to some 430 families, with the promise that we will double again in three years.

The initial campaign, In the Seelos Tradition, was for three years, with the promise that there would be another campaign to follow for an additional three years. Why? Most capital campaigns are for 5 years, but because we were small in numbers and because we knew of the potential growth, we decided the original campaign would be for a shorter time.

Our three years are up! And it is now time to move ahead. For all who have contributed so generously, I can say only a humble thank you, we would not be here today without your yes. But I need to ask you, if possible, to extend your giving for another three years.

And for those who have not yet, been asked to give, we are hoping you will consider a sacrificial gift to be given *In the Seelos Tradition* for three to five years. Your gifts will benefit the parish 100%, meaning no part of this will go anywhere except to the retiring of the debt

We are in debt some 5.2 million dollars. The next three to five years is essential to be a bridge that will get us to a point of growth where we can begin to manage the debt using parish funds.

In the next 10 weeks, we will be reaching out to all of you and asking you help move the parish forward. It will take all of us with the grace of God to accomplish our plan of retiring the debt in 5 to 8 years.

From there the plan is to build a permanent church that will seat at least 1000 people. I hope to begin the design of Church within 5 years. There is talk of a Catholic School, all this is under consideration. If God wants it, if you want it...it will happen. But not before this debt is retired.

While I am speaking to you about debt and a building, what I know we are doing here is fundamentally not about brick and mortar, but about leaving a legacy that will effect 10's of thousands of people. We are talking about a legacy that will last 100+ years, long after my name will be in some book of remembrance. I can't think of anything more worthy, than a legacy of passing the faith on to a future generations of children, caring for the poor and feeding our people with the Eucharist.

Thank you again to being so gracious to me and the parish. Please prayerfully consider what you might be able to do to help grow the parish and serve the community of Spanish Fort. And please generously welcome our team into your home when they contact you. All this will take place beginning now and completed before Thanksgiving.

God Bless you