

The Narrow Door

And Jesus said, "Try to come through the narrow door. Many, I tell you will try to enter and be unable. There will be wailing and grinding of teeth ... and *you yourselves rejected*".

In the gospel, Jesus is telling us not to rest on our laurels. He is pointing out complacency and issuing a call to action. He is telling us that many may not do or be enough. He wants us to be uncomfortable.

In preparing to do this homily, in thinking about the Gospel, I got angry. So, I Googled, homilies, and I got even angrier.

Other homilists suggest that Jesus is speaking to us. They assert that, yes, Jesus is speaking to an audience in his time who were complacent in their heritage, their pedigree, their ritual observation of the Sabbath and their study of the Torah. Yes he is telling them to get moving, to do more, to act and to be different. But arguably, Jesus is telling us that too. These homilists tell us to take Jesus' words not as metaphor but at face value. Jesus is telling us that many will try and fail to enter through the narrow door. Many of us will not measure up. Many of us will not be entering the kingdom.

The mainstream Catholic Church seems to agree. They changed their Eucharistic Prayer to read that Christ's blood "... will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sin". Note the operative word "many". It used to be "all", as in "It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven". In explaining the word-change, the website *Today's Catholic* opines that "The recovery of the wording "*for many*" affirms that salvation is not completely automatic".

The idea that many may not enter the Kingdom of Heaven made me angry. Surely Jesus can't be speaking to us, not to our beloved Dignity/Boston family that strives to be inclusive and to fight for social justice and where we fervently remind ourselves not to be our own oppressors. . Is Jesus telling us that we may not be enough, that there is something wrong with us? How dare he, heretical Mike wanted to scream.

And yet. And yet as strange as it may sound, in my better moments, in my calmest, most meditative, most prayerful, most imaginative, most open, most humble moments, at those times, I can accept the idea that if there is a heaven, the entrance requirements are God's to determine. I can accept the notion in *"Today's Catholic"* that "... each individual must also accept and abide in the grace won by Christ in order to attain eternal life".

After all, we are not God. We are not omnipotent or omniscient. We are mortal, human, limited. I will never be perfect. None of us will. At the risk of sounding like a Southern Baptist preacher, we are all flawed. Who can deny it? "Let them who are without sin cast the first stone". There is no such person.

In Job 38, God chastises us against our arrogance and our judgment of what should and should not be. "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?" God said. God was speaking of the magnificence of creation and that God is the creator, not you and I. There are no words adequate to express the wonder and magnitude and diversity of God's creation. I submit that we should be humbled by it. Our knees must bend before it. In the face of God's creation, we must accept that it is God's grace alone that rules. Our belief that we and not God who are truly in control is largely illusory.

Think on it. Think of the glory of God's creation and of your place in it.

We are part of a universe that itself may be part of a multiverse, one universe of many. Those other universes may adhere to different rules of physics, with different cosmological constants and operate fundamentally different than our own. We know nothing of these other universes or of how many there may be. And at this level of reality with its own perspectives, its own experiences, there is no evidence of
Michael Sullivan

Our universe alone has existed for 12 billion years and is comprised of perhaps 200 billion galaxies each having about 100 billion stars. There are super nova and black holes, quasars, planets, moons, and maybe world after world of life, maybe intelligent life, all potentially operating very differently and existing in states of being very different from one

another, possibly a virtual infinity of experiences and perspectives all wondrous and totally different than our own. And again there is no Michael Sullivan to be found at this level of reality.

Our solar system alone has eight planets. Our Earth looks like a star from even the closest of our neighboring planets, a speck in the sky. Michael Sullivan has no substance, no reality from the perspectives of the planets beyond our own.

The Earth is where we live. The Earth has a surface area of 197 million square miles. It has 8.7 million species. It has 7.5 billion people. Yes, finally, at this scale, I am observable; but I'm still tiny. On Earth, millions of species other than our own live their own glorious realities, totally different than our own. You only have to observe an ant crawling or a bird flying or a plant in the sunshine or a dog sniffing the glorious odors he or she but not you or I can smell. Michael Sullivan has little significance to the species different from his own.

Yes, as a human being, I suppose I might be noticed. But I'm just one member of the human species with a very, very short life span in cosmic terms, living usually within the confines of a mere 2000 square miles. The truth is that we're puny, all of us.

And yet, of course, there is punier still. There are perspectives and experiences and ways of being smaller than ourselves that we cannot really understand. We are made of about 60 percent water and share our bodies with literally trillions of microorganisms. I'm not conscious of either the water or the microorganisms. I presume these have their own perspectives and experiences and realities of which I know nothing.

I know I have organs but don't experience their interactions, the flow of my blood through my veins, the oxygenation of my blood by my lungs, and so on. These organs are composed of trillions of cells, largely invisible to us but essential for supplying our energy. That is yet another level of reality beyond my experience.

And everything in our bodies is made of atoms, in turn composed of protons, electrons and neutrons, in turn composed of quarks. And these

subatomic particles, as small as they are, have their own realities, their own ways of being. They share so called “spooky particles of entanglement” wherein actions characterizing some of them are mirrored by others potentially far, far away with no apparent explanation for why there should be any correlation. None of this is any way something I experience. Yet, we are told; and I believe in these realities.

Even just within the level of reality that we human beings all occupy, if it can even be called a single level of reality, there is infinite diversity of experience. This is the kind of diversity we usually glorify. It is just as real and as beautiful and as amazing as all the others; but it is just one level of reality. Each of us has our own stories, histories, likes and dislikes, faults and strengths, gifts, and hurts. I believe that we are largely informed unconsciously. There are narratives underlying our conscious thought. There are personas that influence our moods and behaviors. We live in a variety of circumstances; and, though we don't like to admit it, can succumb in a heartbeat to misfortune.

And now having heard all of that, my best attempt at expressing the inexpressible wonder and profundity and infinity of perspective that is God's creation, I ask again, whether to accept the possibility that I may be judged not enough in what I do and in what I am. Do we do enough? Yes, we do social justice, and that's great. Truly. But is it enough? Is what we do and give and live enough? Is who we are? Is there more we could do, more we could be? Have we sold all our possessions to work with the poor in Honduras? Do we take our week, or two or three or four of vacation to minister to the suffering? And how do we compare to people of much less means and ability and intelligence and circumstance? Are we more worthy than the widow who put in a few cents, giving all that she had when we give our alms to the poor? Should we do more?

These questions are profound and personal. My answer is the same as Tevye's in Fiddler on the Roof when he was asked about the origin of tradition. It was this. “I'll tell you, I don't know. And that's the point. I can't know. We can't know. How could we? The multiverse is just too nuanced and layered to permit it. Assuming there is heaven, it is God's judgment that defines its requirements.

It is God's grace that let us be here at all, to be born and to live on this wonderful, infuriating, painful, enthralling, joyful, ugly, gorgeous, profound planet. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said "Indifference to the sublime wonder of living is the root of sin." I think that's true. There is so much beauty around us. We just don't see it sometimes. We're caught up inside ourselves, in our own inner dialog and fog. In our best moments, let us be grateful for whatever the day brings, for the colors and sounds that surround us.

I think that in the end, loving our foibles, accepting our imperfections and forgiving ourselves and trying as best we can is all we can do. To paraphrase Larry Yang, try to be as loving as you can in this moment; and if not loving, kind; and if not kind, nonjudgmental; and if not nonjudgmental, not to do harm; and if harm you must do, may you cause the least harm possible.

Do what you can, then let it go and maybe forgive yourself if you can't fit through the narrow door.