

## **21 Sunday Ordinary Time, C**

Our gospel reading for today speaks to us of the necessity for discipline. This is one of life's requirements. Apart from it there can be no effective living in any realm. Life, itself, demands discipline. Discipline is not elective; it is required. Otherwise, our personal lives and all of society with them would come apart at the seams.

Jesus told his disciples to "Strive to enter through the narrow gate." That is what discipline really means. Undisciplined living is broad and careless and easy. But disciplined living involves effort, concentration, and control. It is a narrow gate, but there is no other way of salvation. Yet deep in the human heart are thoughts and feelings that rise up in protest against the very idea of disciplined living. So, let us organize our thoughts by dealing with a few of these objections.

Some people resist the idea of discipline because they want to lead a full and abundant life. And we can certainly understand that objection. Everybody wants a lot of life. We would like to experience as much of it as we possibly can. And this is the very thing Jesus was talking about. He spoke of the feast in the kingdom of God. That is what we all want life to be. But one must enter the banquet hall through the narrow gate of disciplined living. That is not some religious rule. It is just a fact of life. The ingredients of success in every area of living involve discipline or as Jesus said, "a narrow gate." Attention for example, is narrow scope. It speaks of the ability of a person to concentrate, to focus his mind. This

required discipline, but the undisciplined mind is inattentive. It just drifts from here to there and wanders from place to place. Determination is also narrow. The determine person disciplines himself and make a choice. The undisciplined person wonders from one option to another. Loyalty is also narrow. It binds us to a specific devotion. You cannot be loyal to your wife or your husband or your friend or your faith in a loose and casual sort of way. Loyalty puts limits on our lives and requires us to live within them. But if we are disloyal we bound to nothing or no one.

When Jesus said, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate,” he was talking about life, all of it. The banquet hall of abundant living can be entered only through the narrow gate of discipline.

A second objection to discipline is the resentment of restraint and the desire to let one self go. The obvious question there is: which self do you want to let go? None of us is only one self. Every one of us is made up of a multitude of interest, aspirations, appetites, and desires. And many of them cross purposes with one another. For example, in a college student, there is one self that wants to run and play all day and all night. There is another self that would like to do well in school. One of those two selves must be restraining in order to turn the other loose. They both cannot go at the same time. Life does not work that way.

Each of us must arrange our many selves in some logical order. There are many ways of missing life and messing it up. But in every realm –

school, home, business, religious faith, and eternity there is one way of salvation; and there is the narrow gate of disciplined living. You want to let yourself go; that's fine. Just be careful which self you restrain and which one you turn loose.

Then look briefly at one other objection to discipline, and that is the desire to be free. We all want to be free, and we can be certain that our Lord understand that desire. He refused to be shackled by the trivial traditions and rules of the Pharisees. He broke that bondage and went free. Any man worth his salt wants liberty and freedom; and Christ, above all others. But let us also face the fact that there are some things from which we never can be free. For example, if we want to be a musician we must bind ourselves to the basic laws of harmony and rhythm. The same we may say about life. If we want to have a full and abundant life, we must bind ourselves to the basics laws of life – not trivial rules and traditions but great and eternal principles. We can never be free from those, not if we really want to live.

Jesus lived by those principles; in thirty three short years, he did more living than any other person ever has. His life was disciplined, but it was full and it was free. Now he offers the same life to you and me. Hear him as he says, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate,” that leads to a “feast in the kingdom of God.” **Amen.**