

Pentecost 11 8/21/22  
Luke 13:22-30 16C

## STRIVE TO ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW DOOR.

So, there I was -- tears running down my eyes, mucus freely flowing from my nostrils, saliva uncontrollably streaming from my mouth – clawing, and scratching, and digging with my fingernails in the concrete blocks trying with all my might, what was left of it anyway, to find the door. I was, after all, in the tear gas chamber.

I'm guessing that for most of you, the most interaction you have had with tear gas is seeing it on tv. For those chosen few who have undergone military training, you are all-too-well acquainted with the tear gas chamber. The tear gas chamber is this 12x12 building, made of concrete blocks, with one single, solitary door. The purpose is to instill confidence and trust in your gas mask. The game is played like this: You put on your gas mask, march into the chamber with about a dozen others, an instructor pops the tear gas canister, smoke and haze fill the room, you start doing pushups, bends and thrusts, and jumping jacks until you are panting for breath, and then, *then*, the order comes to remove your mask. Again, for those of you whose life is void of this most-wondrous experience, the first gasp of breath is no big deal. Then, you take the 2<sup>nd</sup> breath and the best way I can describe it is that it feels like you have been hit in the face with a flame thrower.

And, to add insult to injury, this was my 2<sup>nd</sup> time through the tear gas chamber. Most just enjoy it just once, but come on now, have you ever heard me claim to be a smart man? There I was at Chaplain Officer Basic Course – CHOBIC – in the tear gas chamber. Put on the mask, march in, poof – the canister explodes, off comes the mask, and I know what's

coming. So, I just refused to breath, thinking I would rather hold my breath until I died than breath in one breath of tear gas. There stood our sergeant instructor yelling in my face, “You need to breath, Chaplain! You need to breath!” And it happened – I breathed – all that precious tear gas flowed into my nose, my mouth, my eyes, every pore of my body. And the most prized thing on earth became that one single, solitary door out.

The door, the door, the door. We want to find the door, to get out of this valley of the shadow of death. And, this morning, Jesus tells us it is a narrow door. “Strive – *struggle*,” He says, to enter through the narrow door” (v. 24).

This was in the last days of Jesus’ earthly life. He was making His way to Jerusalem where He would suffer many things, and be killed, and on the third day be raised (cf. Mt 16:21). And as He made His way, “someone said to Him, ‘Lord, will those who are saved be few’”? (v. 23).

That’s a good question, isn’t it? It’s a good question, because that is your question. Here you are. You don’t have to go into the tear gas chamber to know what it’s like to be gasping for breath just to live. You know what it’s like to try to breath in the midst of violence and mayhem, looting and burning of property; perversity, a spouse spoke who once said, “I do,” but now says, “I don’t love you anymore;” trips to the doctor’s office, IV’s, chemotherapy; wagging tongues that destroy your name and reputation with gossip; worry, fear, regret, despair, and your grave is before you with every breath of earthly life. And you want to know for sure: Will I be saved?

And Jesus, being Jesus, doesn’t answer yes or no. He says “Strive – *struggle* – to enter through the narrow door.”

Here's why He says that. If He answered, "Yes" – oh no! You would be left in doubt, despairing, in worry and fear, "Do I believe enough; is my faith strong enough." You would be left wondering, "Maybe, just maybe, I won't make it".

On the other hand, if He answered, "No," then your flesh would make you think you've got it made! All good dogs got to heaven, right? Hey, "Chief of sinners, though I be there are many who are worse than me". So take it easy, do your own thing, go your own way, because, he who dies with the most toys wins.

See what's happening here. If Jesus had answered yes or no, it becomes all about you. It's all about me! You naval gaze. And when you naval gaze, looking at yourself, you take your eyes off Jesus.

"I am the door," Jesus said, "I am the door of the sheep" (Jn 10:7). Remember, Scripture interprets Scripture. That means we understand the harder, more difficult passages in light of the clearer passages of Scripture. The image of the "door" is common throughout Scripture. And we must always remember that all of the Bible points to the cross. The "door" in the Bible always points to Jesus.

I mentioned Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. There, He would be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, beaten, mocked, crucified, and buried.

And, you will recall that His tomb was sealed with a stone. But, the first day of the week, that stone was rolled back and the grave was empty! That's right – the door of the grave is open! Cherish the promise of your Savior, "Because I live, you shall live also" (Jn 14:19).

There's another episode in the book of Acts. The Apostles are thrown in prison for preaching the Gospel. During the night, an "angel of

the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out” (Ac 5:19). That’s right, Dear Child of God, the prison house of sin and death and the grave are open for you.

“I am set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut,” the Lord of the Church says to His saints (Re 3:8). Jesus has opened the door of heaven to all believers.

But, we’re not there yet, are we? In the weakness of our flesh, we naval gaze, despairing and worrying and fearing, not God, but the things of today. We are seduced by the world to love the here and now, seeking popularity with a world perishing rather than seeking to please the eternal God. Oh, and the lies of the father of all lies. How quick we are to believe his lies.

And, in all of that, we lose sight of Jesus. Yes, the door to heaven is open to you, Dear Child of God, but Jesus reminds you it is a narrow door, because we are beset by so many and great dangers.

A woman bought a parrot at a pet store, but she returned it the next day. “This bird doesn’t talk,” she told the store clerk.

“Do you have a mirror in his cage?” the clerk asked. “Parrots often start talking when they see themselves in a mirror.” The woman bought a mirror and left.

The next day she returned – the bird still didn’t talk. The clerk asked, “Do you have a ladder in his cage? Parrots love ladders and a happy parrot is a talkative parrot.” The woman bought a ladder and left.

The next day it was a swing. That didn’t help either. Soon she returned to the pet store and reported, “The parrot died.”

The clerk sympathized. “I’m sorry. Did he ever say a word?” “Yes,” the woman answered, “Just before he died, he said – in a very weak voice – ‘Don’t they sell any food at that pet store?’”

The world around us is full of mirrors, and ladders, and swings, in which we are daily tempted to fear, love, and trust to keep us from entering through the narrow door. But, we have the bread of life, Jesus Christ. In the new birth of Holy Baptism, He has made us His own child. In His Word, He brings us that bread to eat. In the Sacrament of Holy Communion, His very body and blood are offered to us with the bread and wine. May we always be willing – by the enabling of the Holy Spirit – to receive these things from God, so that we may ever fix our eyes on Jesus, the door to heaven.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.