

There's a fascinating image from the Baltimore Catechism about the "narrow gate" that Jesus is talking about. The drawing is very campy, as are all the illustrations in the Baltimore Catechism and so is unintentionally funny, even for such a serious topic.

It shows a road that split off in two- on one side there is Jesus cheering on a family that looked like it came right out of "*Father Knows Best*", walking very gracefully and purposefully, I'd say almost smugly, toward the gates of heaven- the signpost simply reads "*Love of God*". The other road had signposts that simply said "*Love of Pleasure/Fame/Power/Riches*" and it showed people running wildly toward the flames of hell- one woman with a mink coat and high heels and waving her arms, one man with a suitcase with giant dollar signs on it, a very sophisticated-looking couple with the woman looking at herself lovingly in a mirror. Not very subtle, is it?

And the subtext of the image is that if you want to have any fun, if you want to enjoy life at all, watch out- you're on the road to the flames of hell. But if you want to go to heaven and be saved, then be prepared to live a very sedate life- in other words, prepare to be bored. Because the road to hell looks like fun, doesn't it?

Notice in the Gospel reading we heard that Jesus doesn't give an answer to the question of whether only a few people will be saved. And that is because Jesus will not restrict the salvation God is offering through him only to the select few who could jump through hoops and prove they are worthy of God's mercy and love. In the parable He then relates, it's clear that the invitation to enter into the Kingdom of God is open to everyone, but there's a catch- it's not easy to get in, not at all. It demands more than a casual, occasional interest and it demands a lot more than just claiming to know who Jesus is and that they have heard what He taught. Or in other

words, don't assume that just because you profess to be a follower of Jesus you will be saved- you have to put your money where your mouth is.

The urgency of the message can be attributed to the fact that the Kingdom of God had already begun in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and now it was only a matter of time before that Kingdom would come in its fullness and history as we know it would be over- that's the master of the house locking the door once and for all. So even though we don't expect the end of history to come anytime soon- although you never know- you still have to make a choice of whether you will help make the Kingdom of God come to life or you will stand in its way.

So the choice is ours- will you live your life with a desire to improve the lives of yourself, your family and friends and your community, or will you act in ways that are all about you and that turn you more and more into yourself, away from God and away from the people that share your life? Will you take the easy way out- that is, the wide gate- or will you take the more demanding way, that is, the narrow gate?

The narrow gate implies that we don't drag along with us those things that are undeniably attractive and pleasurable, but don't help us in the long run. So if we want to go through the narrow gate to eternal life in God, we won't take along our ambitions or our material possessions or our religious or social status- we'll bring in who we are, as we are, and that's more than good enough.

Because it's not that those things are bad in themselves- not at all- it's just that when we give our entire selves to these things and use them for our own selfish ends, we become slaves of them instead of us controlling how we will be benefited by them. Remember those signposts I mentioned in that image from the Baltimore Catechism- riches, pleasure, fame, power- you could

make an argument that if you used those things for the good of yourself and of the people around you, you would be advancing on the road to God and not on the road to hell. And you'd be enjoying life a whole lot more than that perfect family in the image who may be technically virtuous but who make the Christian life so boring and lifeless no one would want to live a Christian life.

Christian life should be full of joy and it should be a celebration of the good things God has given us. God wants to us to enjoy what we have but if they affect adversely our relationship with God and they don't help us to follow Jesus Christ, it is then we have to re-examine what these things are doing to us and act accordingly- simple as that. And if we don't succeed at first, we try again and get back on the road.