

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson  
**21st August 2022 - 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Readings (Year C): 1st: Isaiah 66:18-21. Psalm: 116. 2nd: Hebrews 12:5-7,11-13. Gospel: Luke 13:22-30.

Most of you that know me know ‘all sport passes me by.’ So I can’t believe how much there has been in the past few months, all the games and sports of almost every description taking up hours of some ordinary TV channels. What we do know though is that to achieve anything involves hours, weeks, months, even years of training.

When Jesus in the gospel today says ‘try your best’ the Greek word for ‘try your best’ actually means ‘to wrestle with.’ It involves struggle and effort.

That chimes in with our 2<sup>nd</sup> reading, where the author to Hebrews, who is writing to Christians who were faltering in their faith, talks of how the Lord trains those he loves; suffering is part of your training. A sense of intense concentration and commitment is required if we are to be true disciples. Salvation depends first on God’s grace, then on our cooperation and obedience.

Jesus here stresses the difficulties for the spiritual life while the door remains open. Luke gives four answers to the question asked of Jesus, ‘Sir, will only a few be saved? Try to enter by the narrow door: the ruler of the house may close the door on some people; the saved ones will come from all over the world; the last ones will be the first ones.’

Jesus does not answer the question directly. He is not prepared to play a numbers game regarding how many will enter the kingdom of God. Such matters are better left to the wisdom and mercy of God.

For Jesus the issue is not how many people will enter the kingdom: the issue is how we react to the invitation to enter. One fact is urgent and clear: the kingdom of God is already present, and is an open door. But that door is not so easily negotiable to allow for idle speculation to replace determined action. It will not remain open indefinitely: the idle and indifferent may well be too late.

The traditional interpretation of this text is that it is about the after-life; it is about heaven (and there is a mention of weeping and grinding of teeth- hell.) The 1<sup>st</sup> reading is about God ‘gathering his people: about salvation and judgement.’ Picked up in the shortest of all Psalms, and the one always used at the Adoremus during Benediction.

If we are saved, we are taken up to heaven; the narrow door is the door to heaven. Jesus is the one who opens the door to heaven to the saved, and closes it against the un-saved. Salvation is open to people from every race and nation. At one point Jesus describes how the door is left ajar, so that we can look inside and see there Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the prophets. They are there because of the roles they played **on earth**.

It is **on earth** that in faith they devoted themselves working and worshipping God – and **here** that they struggled for justice and peace. The status of being ‘saved’ is just as valid now as will be in the after-life.

It is in **this life** that you are either in the kingdom of God or out of it. Jesus, though, is the ultimate realist. He never cajoled his people or forced them to do as he said. Rather his language of love is of warning, urging and pleading.

Jesus taught clearly and unequivocally that our eternal destiny is profoundly linked to his person. To accept him as Lord and worship him as God is the key of the door: to walk humbly before him is the way through the narrow gate.

St Ambrose shrewdly observed ‘He would never come and knock at the door, unless to enter; it is our fault He does not always enter.’

Or as we set out for ordination Canon Sydney Evans, the Dean of Kings College said ‘**All you can do is love people into the kingdom of God.**’