

## 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time: The narrow gate

The high school Teens gathered in a larger circle as they did every Wednesday for the Pass It On meeting in our Diocese called Core. The Wednesday format would begin with a young person giving a talk, and then people in the circle, about 50 of them, sharing their thoughts. After that, the priests there would say Mass. It was a great experience in those days long before the International experience we celebrate as Life Teen. Anyway, the topic this particular Wednesday was the Fourth Commandment, Honor Your Father and Mother. Only, the discussion and sharing did not begin as we priests, had hoped. Each Teen started building on how unfair they felt their parents were. One Teen mentioned that she was helping someone prepare for a test and lost track of time, coming home 30 minutes after her curfew. Her parents responded by telling her that she could not go to the football game on Friday. How unfair they all agreed; even though the Teen did not bother to call home. So this kept going on and on, building up, when Cindy decided to share. She mentioned that she had no curfew. She could stay out as long as she wanted, even on school nights. She said that her parents never concerned themselves with her grades, either. They said it was up to her to do what she needed. She went on to say that she basically had no rules, even though she was only 16. Then she started bawling, "Why don't my parents love me?"

If they loved her, then they would be guiding her to make the best choices. If they loved her, they would have a structure in place to help her meet her potential. If they loved her they wouldn't hesitate to punish her for doing something wrong.

The second reading says that all discipline is difficult, but comes as a result of love. Now this reading is directed to second and third generation Christians. Their parents or grandparents embraced Christianity with enthusiasm, even though this meant suffering for Christ. But the people today's reading speaks to did not have the enthusiasm of those who came before them. They were complaining that it was too difficult to be a Christian. "Life up your drooping hands, shore up your shaking knees, and become strong in your faith," the reading tells them....and 'us.

"Father, I am the only one in my class who is still a virgin, and I'm a senior," the girl told me. I responded that ""I was sure she was wrong about the others, but even if she were right, she was feeling the challenge of living her faith. She was disciplining herself.

But everybody else is doing it. No, everybody else isn't drinking, experimenting with drugs, having sex. OK, perhaps a lot are, but they are destroying their present and their future. "Enter through the narrow gate," Jesus says in today's Gospel. Make the choice to do what is right, not what everyone else is doing. The gate is wide that leads to the destruction of our spiritual lives. The gate to serve the Lord is narrow, is difficult, but it leads to a life of joy here and eternal happiness after this life.

So, the young couple in college can see that their relationship is not just dating

but is leading to a commitment of marriage. In their senior year, they start talking about their future together. A year and a half later, they make their discussions official and public. They become engaged. Marriage is less than a year away. By complete coincidence, they find themselves in the same university for graduate school. Everyone takes it for granted that they will live together. They say, "No." They are not going to sully or even destroy their future by having sex before marriage." The gate so many of their classmates choose is wide. These people say that they are going to live together and then get married. This is not the way of the young committed Catholic couple. Their choice is the narrow gate. But their commitment is to love each other in the Lord. They want their love making to be a celebration of the Sacrament of matrimony, and so they wait. And the waiting takes discipline. It is difficult, but it results in a marriage that is a true union of love in the Lord.

I often tell the couples that I prepare for marriage that after they marry they shouldn't have sex. Their eyes pop out. I can sense either tears or a decision that this priest is a wacko. I then say, "When you are married, don't have sex with each other; make love to each other. The first, having sex, is purely physical and is often concerned with the selfish needs of an individual, or two selfish needs added together. The second, making love, is concerned with the other person. It is sacrificial love. It considers giving oneself to a spouse just as Jesus gave himself to us.

"Hey, Father. This Catholic thing is difficult," the new Catholic, a young man in this 20's, complained. "I have to behave myself on dates; even if the other person wants to misbehave." Well, God bless him, but, "Suck it up, man. Shore up your drooping hands and firm up your weak knees and serve the Lord in all aspects of life. "Learn that real love is based on discipline.

To him, to you and to me the Lord says, "Take the narrow road that leads to lasting happiness, everlasting happiness."