

# HOMILY ~ 21st SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

## AUGUST 20-21, 2022

I have had a GPS for many years, and I absolutely love it. I have to confess that I am directionally challenged, so I depend upon it and I follow it. I have been in the car with someone who says: *"I do not think this is correct. I think we should turn left."* And if I am driving, I always say: *"I don't know where I am going so I am following the GPS."* I just blindly follow the GPS. A number of years ago, I was driving to Connecticut to visit my brother. I was several hours into the trip out in the middle of nowhere, when my GPS stopped working. I actually had no idea where I was. I kept driving straight for a while, hoping the GPS would kick back in, but it did not. I decided to pull off of the interstate, figure out where I was and maybe call my brother. I did not know what I was going to do. When I pulled off the interstate, a miracle happened. There, in the distance, was a Best Buy! I stopped, bought a new GPS and I was back in business. Our lives are like that. Sometimes we are traveling along on automatic pilot and everything seems to be fine; and something unexpected happens, and our lives screech to a halt. I was glad that God provided me with an easy solution.

In the Gospel Reading today, someone asks Jesus if only a few people will be saved. Jesus does not answer that question. Instead, he says: *"Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough."* I think that Jesus does not answer the question about how many will be saved, because all of us can be saved, we just need to strive to enter through the narrow gate. I think our lives consist of a series of narrow gates. Just like me with my GPS. We travel along on automatic pilot, and then we approach a narrow gate. Our GPS stops working. Narrow gates in our lives can include: a difficult medical diagnosis; the death of someone we love; the loss of a job; a conflict in an important relationship; trouble at work. When we meet the narrow gate, we need to honestly discern who we are, what we believe and what God is asking us to do. He will help us if we listen to him.

So, what prevents us from entering through the narrow gate? Sometimes, we do not want to accept the narrow gate. We particularly do this with conflict. No one likes conflict, so we ignore it and hope it goes away. We distract ourselves with temporary pleasures: alcohol, food, pornography, sex, gambling, whatever. This gives us a temporary distraction, but it does not change the situation. If we do not face the narrow gate, our temporary pleasure will develop into an addiction. Sometimes we try to control an uncontrollable situation or control other people. That is a losing battle. Rather than turn to God, we sometimes decide to enter the narrow gate alone. We may ask ourselves what does our culture tell us that we *"should"* do? Did you ever just *"should"* all over yourself? I should make more. I should be playing more sports and be doing better in school. I should just give up because this is too hard. When we should all over ourselves, we are usually telling ourselves that we are not good enough and we are not able to make it through the narrow gate. The negativity is not helpful. That negativity is never from God. God loves us unconditionally and will only encourage us. We can also try to please other people to get their approval or just avoid

looking bad. That will only be helpful if we want to be the person that other people want us to be, rather than being the person God is calling us to be.

In discerning God's will, we need to be more present in our lives each day as we live. I think it is good to put the address of our destination in our GPS; but if we blindly follow it, we may miss the detours along the way. Sometimes where we think we are going is not the important destination. Sometimes God has something else in mind. We do not have to be stopped by a life crisis to change course. Are you just trying to get through another day, or are you open to what is happening along the way? We do not discern God's will in isolation. We need to be open to the opportunities that God brings into our lives and the people that God brings into our lives to help us. Frequently when I discern God's will, it does not seem like the next logical step to me. That is how I know it may be from God. Sometimes I am not sure exactly why I am called to do something; I just know I am supposed to do it. Getting to heaven does not depend upon what happens the moment we die. It is shaped by how we navigate all of the narrow gates we encounter along the way. We can all get through the narrow gates of our lives with the help of God. Nothing is impossible with God.

Love & Peace,

Fr. Jim