

21 Sunday C

August 22, 2010

Cathedral

5:00 and 8:00

Theme: If we are to stay with Jesus on his journey to Jerusalem—with its cross as well as glory—we need to keep disciplined and well trained in discipleship.

“Lord, will only a few people be saved?”

It’s a question about numbers. A half of us, or three-quarters—is that how many will make it to heaven? And what about those outside, like those who will go to the Donna Summer’s concert at the Botanic Gardens tonight, but not to worship on Sunday?

“Lord, will only a few people be saved?” The way the question is asked—well, it’s insightful. How many will “*be saved*”? We don’t save ourselves. We don’t earn salvation. Salvation is something given us by God: we are redeemed and given the gift of salvation. (1)

Let’s cut to the chase. How many will make it? Jesus dodges the question and turns it back on us. **“Strive to enter through the narrow gate.”** The verb here is one used for athletes in training. They strive mightily, these sweltering days being lathered in sweat, grimacing as they train their muscles. The verb here, *angonizomai*, is where we get the word, “agonize.” Straining every muscle, athletes are focused on training, on improving their game, on winning.

The Letter to the Hebrews also teaches about training. Five times it uses the word “discipline.” It’s talking about our “spiritual exercise,” using the image of athletic training to make the point.

I’m a member of the Downtown Y. If all those who are members of the Y actually showed up at one time, we’d come close to filling up every seat at Autozone Park next door. So many are members of the gym in name only. They come to the gym a few times, and then begin to slack off. Actually, that’s why I go consistently. I’ve told others: If I begin to get careless in

my exercise, and not focused...well, I'd become "AWOL." I'm afraid I'd give up the training and not be fit.

Sisters and brothers: the Gospel specifically begins today by noting that Jesus is making his way to Jerusalem. Four chapters earlier (Luke 9:51) we heard that Jesus became resolute and determined as he began his journey to Jerusalem, knowing that *there* he would meet the cross head-on. This Sunday St. Luke's Gospel reminds us that he's on that journey. That's why he's telling us to put all our effort **"to enter by the narrow gate."** Like a dedicated athlete, grimacing with every muscle straining to its limit, we've got to keep our focus—on Jesus, and on being his disciple. Quite frankly, eventually the **"narrow gate"** will become the **"closed door."**

I don't want to be a member of the Y in name only. Nor do we want to be his disciples in name only—or only on the Lord's Day, at Sunday Mass. The Letter to the Hebrews puts it bluntly: **"So strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees. Make straight paths for your feet, that what is lame may not be disjointed but healed."**

(1) See Barbara E. Reid, O.P., "Spiritual Training," in America (August 16-23, 2010), pg. 30.