



Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue  
in the City of New York

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[www.SaintThomasChurch.org](http://www.SaintThomasChurch.org)

**Sunday, February 28, 2010**  
*The Second Sunday in Lent*

*Choral Eucharist*  
*at 11am*

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A Sermon by  
The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, Rector  
on  
Saint Luke 13:22-35

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*GO ON WITH THE GAME*

Strive to enter by the narrow door. St. Luke 13:22-35

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. The time for his ministry in Galilee has ended, and he has set his face for what awaits him in the Holy City, namely, his crucifixion. So there is a sense of urgency in today's Gospel reading from Saint Luke. Some one asks, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" Jesus gives his questioner an answer which is tinged with the urgency of the moment and relevant two thousand years later for us.

Jesus demonstrates that the question, Will those who are saved be few, is in the wrong form, although it has long interested all sorts of people. The question is not, How many, but rather, How. That is, How is one, How am I, to be saved? The question is not about those other people: what about them, will they be saved? The question is about me: What about me? How can I be saved? Recall that Jesus, responding to the questioner in today's Gospel, turned the speculative question into an existential, personal challenge: "Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able."

The door to what? Seek to enter what? Jesus is speaking of the door, the entry to the Kingdom of God, particularly the privilege of "sitting at table in the Kingdom of God." His answer on how to gain entry is in the verb, strive. We must strive, that is, work hard, even struggle, to enter that narrow door to the Kingdom.

Furthermore, Jesus says, we are allotted only so much time. Time is short; eternity is long. The opportunity we have to enter is only for a while; a while, as in now! Carpe diem! Seize the day of opportunity.

When time is up and the door is closed, there is a striking exchange between those standing outside and the Lord of the banquet inside. Those outside complain, "We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets." We went to church at a wedding and

a funeral or two; we even took the bread and wine; we heard words from the Bible. Yet the Lord replies, “I tell you, I do not know where you come from; depart from me, all you workers of iniquity!” Yikes.

Familiarity does not make for entry. Because I am a lifelong Episcopalian (or whatever), because I know things about the Church, does not mean the Lord knows me (or that I know him). If I have not cared to be concerned about God’s Kingdom, then I should not be surprised that I am not included in it. Desire for God, attraction to the Good News of Christ, is what counts, and therefore people will come from all sorts of surprising places, people who may not be members of the old club; thus some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.

What does it mean to have the Kingdom of God at the center of one’s concern? The narrow door does not imply a narrow mind, but it does imply some life-principles that we can understand. What is your highest priority? If something is your highest priority, then it becomes the organizing principle of your thoughts, words, and actions. We can think of several kinds of highest priorities that obtain in contemporary life – and probably have obtained in every age one way or another.

For example one’s highest priority may be making money, or accumulating power and status. It may be the pursuit of art or knowledge. One’s highest priority may be physical health or appearance. It may be serving a political ideology or advancing a set of values. One’s highest priority may be the service of one’s country. One’s highest priority may be the success of an institution, a corporation, a society or a club. One highest priority may be more personal, such as serving a family or a loved one, a friend, a husband or wife, a child or parent. In all these cases, the highest priority is manifested as we organize our time and energy around it, as our ambition reveals itself. But if you examine any of these, even those which seem most idealistic or benign can be what Scripture calls idols. The highest priority is an idol, and the organizing principle is idolatry. Idolatry is not life-giving, but stultifying, suffocating, deadly.

The Kingdom of God is not a deadly idol but the realm of the living God; and the organizing principle of its service, ambition for God’s Kingdom, is not numbing possession but life and grace. Its service is perfect freedom. The struggle for the narrow door of the Kingdom is the longing for life itself. What happens when the Kingdom of God is the highest priority? A paradox occurs. The wonderful thing is, all other values – power and influence, art and knowledge, health and beauty, politics and values; love and service of country, institution (even church!), family, friend and loved one – fall into place. For the Kingdom of God may be served in them all, in right proportion and order, when they are not ends in themselves.

A story is told of Saint John Bosco, a servant of the poor, that he was engaged in a ball game with some ragged children who were in his charge. A church prelate drove past the scene in his coach, then stopped, and called out, “John Bosco, what would you do if you knew the Lord was returning now?” The saint replied, “I would go on with this game.” There is always urgency to life, moment by moment. We do not know the day or the hour. In order to gain entry to the heavenly banquet we do well to seek, first and foremost, always, everywhere, Christ’s Kingdom – in whatsoever honorable thing that we are doing. With the Kingdom of God as our highest priority and our life’s organizing principle, we do well to go on with the game, and we will find we have gone right through the door to our seat at the table.

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.