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A man once stood up at a prayer meeting and confessed that he had been a drunkard, a wife beater, been unfaithful, aggressive, a jailbird, a robber. You name it he'd done it. And then he stuck out his chest and he said with all sincerity, 'But I want to thank God that, throughout those years, I never lost my religion. The Gospel today is a warning against those who take their salvation for granted.

Whenever it says in the gospel that 'Jesus was making for Jerusalem', it's a symbolic way of saying he was about to embark on the way of the Cross which would involve rejection, humiliation, crucifixion but ultimately Resurrection. The Devil had suggested to Him in the Desert to take the wide road of worldly power and recognition, or better still captivate the crowd by doing some dare-devil stuff like jumping off the roof of the temple, but Jesus send the devil packing. For us taking the narrow road of the Cross may mean a run-in with people sold on today's 'woke' culture and if our views are somewhat different from theirs, being side-lined or cancelled out. But that's their problem.

Following the narrow way of Jesus will almost certainly run counter to the wide road of the world. Discerning what's right or wrong solely on the strength of worldly wisdom alone would be an unwise choice. People often make moral judgements, not on the basis of their catholic faith, but from a purely worldly point of view, more often than not based on public opinion or a false ideology which they've become slaves to. They are like the locked-out people in today's gospel, who had only a peripheral knowledge of Jesus but who never took his teaching seriously. They could be described as fans of Jesus but certainly not followers.

Have you ever been nagged for being 'over the top' with your religion or for trying too hard? Maybe the real problem is that we are not trying hard enough. In today's Gospel Jesus says:

'try your best to enter by the narrow door because many will try to enter and will not succeed'. This doesn't at all mean that we become artisans of our own salvation. Quite the contrary – it's about co-operating with the grace of God without which no one can enter by the narrow gate.

Some Christians pride themselves on being saved in the here and now but this can betray a dangerous spiritual smugness. Even the great St Paul was loath to entertain such notions. He said: "I'm running in the race but I'm far from thinking that I've already won the prize. "Even though my conscience is clear", he said, "that doesn't mean I'm acquitted". What does he mean? Well, he may have felt guilty at times about cutting corners when informing his conscience or making moral decisions based on personal feelings alone with scant regard for objective truth.

We all rightly hope and pray that our deceased loved ones are gone to a better place but our ultimate destiny is in God's merciful hands. And if we're humble enough to rely on His mercy we won't run out of narrow road until we enter Paradise to take up the place reserved for us in Heaven.