

Twenty-first Sunday Per Annum (C)
August 21, 2016.

Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able (Lk. 13: 24).

The lessons of the Mass today speak to us of the Mystery of Salvation. In symbolic terms the Prophet Isaiah speaks of the universality of salvation; that God offers this gift to all nations. This was the function of Israel of old and it is now the duty of the new Israel of God, the Church. In very specific terms Our Lord speaks to us of the effort needed on our part to ensure that we will in fact be saved. In Hebrew the word for *salvation* signifies primarily the possession of space and the freedom and security which is gained from the removal of constriction, in antithesis to narrowness or straits. Salvation is freedom. In the New Testament salvation is understood as a work of God's mercy that is brought about by Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and the salvation that He confers is salvation from sin. Sin constricts us and limits us. Perhaps Our Lord specifically speaks of a *narrow door*, an image that readily evokes constriction or straits to illustrate that this gift is not so easily given that it requires little or no effort on our part in order to achieve its promise – life in God.

At face value, the question of salvation is irrelevant to many people today. Among believers there are those who presume to possess it – a dangerous assumption; and there are many who see no need for salvation at all. To put it in blunt terms: *Salvation from what?* The illusion of self-sufficiency that is fed by wealth and prosperity makes the whole question of salvation irrelevant. And yet, there is nothing more important than salvation for it determines our fate not only in eternity but here on earth as well. St. Paul summarizes the whole of Sacred Scripture in regard to salvation with these well-known words: *God our Saviour desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4).* This is why we speak of God's universal salvific will. The *knowledge of the truth* that St. Paul speaks of may be likened to the *narrow door* that Our Lord speaks of; and because the Truth is Christ Our Lord Himself, the *narrow door* is Jesus: *I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved (Jn. 10:9).* If we believe this, then we must be firmly rooted in Christ Our Lord. *To believe means to be so rooted in Christ that He becomes the foundation on one's own existence, the beginning and the end...The extent to which we succeed depends on our loyalty and our power of sacrifice (Romano Guardini, The Lord).*

In every age, from the earliest days of our faith down to our own troubled times, the source of the Church's vibrancy and effectiveness as the herald of salvation has always been the depth of commitment that individual Catholics make to Christ Our Lord as *the foundation of our existence, the beginning and the end.* This is what we received from the faithful who have gone before us, our parents and grandparents before them, the faithful priests and sisters and brothers who taught us the authentic, traditional Catholic faith. This is what we in turn must hand on in its entirety, adding nothing that is novel and in no way diluting the sacred deposit of the faith. Sadly, the Catholic world is disarray. The unity of the faith guaranteed by Sacred Tradition is scarcely to be found and the faithful are confused. It seems that the words of St. Paul to Timothy have come true: *For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths (2 Tim. 4:3).* The cause of this universal confusion is the heresy of Modernism which Pope St. Pius X, whose memory

is kept today, strenuously fought. We are privileged to have his relic in our sanctuary. He died in 1914 and was canonized by the Venerable Pope Pius XII in 1954. Pope Pius XII said of this canonization that it was the greatest act of his pontificate, a pontificate of nearly twenty years. Why would this canonization merit such importance, if not for the efforts of St. Pius X to protect the integrity of our faith from the corrosiveness of this heresy. At the very beginning of his pontificate, Pope St. Pius X had clearly stated that his only aim was *to re-establish all things in Christ* (Eph. 1:10); *instaurare omnia in Christo*. (*E Supremi Apostolatus*, October 4, 1903). His reforms were far-reaching and effective and they were all guided by his one overriding concern for the integrity of the faith. Modernism was defined by St. Pius X as the synthesis of all heresies, of all errors. It may be better understood by these statements: *We don't really believe what we believe. The Ten Commandments are not really meant to be strictly followed. We can deliberately miss Mass and it's not a mortal sin. We can vote for politicians who promote the killing of the unborn and the elderly. We can presume to be saved; in fact that everyone is saved because we are nice people. All religions are the same, anyway.*

In what can only be described as prophetic, Pope St. Pius X spoke of the efforts that have borne their terrible fruits in the general indifference that exists even among many Catholics in regard to our salvation; the single most important question that each one of us faces. He observed: *the great movement of apostasy being organized in every country for the establishment of a One-World Church which shall have neither dogmas, nor hierarchy, neither discipline for the mind, nor curb for the passions, and which, under the pretext of freedom and human dignity, would bring back to the world (if such a Church could overcome) the reign of legalized cunning and force, and the oppression of the weak, and of all those who toil and suffer.* In the face of the general state of confusion and indifference to the things that really matter and the crises that threaten both religious and secular institutions, it is our own personal response that matters most and that will have the greatest positive impact on others. Each one of us must resolve to become a saint. This is the simplest way of expressing it. What I am proposing to you the Church has proposed to the faithful in every age. We must foster a supernatural love of God and of neighbour, in this order; and *strive to enter through the narrow door.* If we endeavour as Pope St. Pius X did, to *re-establish all things in Christ*, beginning first and foremost with our own lives, we will be transformed. If union with God here on earth and ultimately in Heaven becomes the overriding motivation for our life, our lives would be transformed and in turn, so would this sad and weary world of ours. What I am proposing is challenging, to say the least; but not impossible. God guarantees His grace to our efforts to love Him with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength and all our mind. Above all, we must rediscover the value and necessity of Sacred Tradition, especially in regard to our worship. Pope St. Pius X did much to enhance the Sacred Liturgy, for he understood its importance as the principal means of our Christian formation. As we worship, so we become. Let us heed his words and take them to heart: *Indeed, the true friends of the people are neither revolutionaries, nor innovators: they are traditionalists.* May the prayers and example of Pope St. Pius X help us to remain steadfast in the truth of Christ and to *re-establish all things in Christ.*