

Wednesday of the 31st Week in Ordinary Time: The Narrow Gate

Homily of Bishop Barres

October 26, 2022

In the 13th Chapter of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus says: “Strive to enter the narrow gate...For behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last.”

Only the Holy Spirit can lead us through the Narrow Gate.

The Holy Spirit refreshes us in our discouragement and always gives us a fresh start toward deep holiness when we ask humbly for that grace.

A critical dimension of striving to enter the narrow gate is silence.

In *The Day is Now Far Spent*, Cardinal Robert Sarah sees the relationship between faith, prayer and silence. He writes: “Faith grows in an intense life of prayer and contemplative silence. It is nourished and strengthened in a daily face-to-face meeting with God and in an attitude of adoration and silent contemplation. It is professed in the Creed, celebrated in the liturgy, lived out in keeping the Commandments. It achieves its growth through an interior life of adoration and prayer. Faith is nourished by the liturgy, by Catholic doctrine, and by the Church’s tradition as a whole. Its principal sources are Sacred Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, and the Magisterium.”¹

Faith, prayer and contemplative silence are interdependent. They grow and expand together or they shrink and contract together. For instance, St. John Henry Newman always emphasized the unity of doctrine and prayer.

Objectively true Catholic doctrine – whether it is Trinitarian doctrine, Christological doctrine, Pneumatological doctrine, Ecclesiological Doctrine, Anthropological, Eschatological or Missiological Doctrine -- guides prayer and contemplation and grounds them in reality and truth, the truth that always sets us free to pray and courageously go on mission.

¹ Robert Cardinal Sarah (with Nicolas Diat), *The Day Is Now Far Spent*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2019), 26.

Prayer and contemplation without doctrine evaporates. Contemplation founded on solid doctrine expands, grows and deepens.

Similarly, we remember Pope Benedict XVI's emphasis on biblical realism in *The Word of the Lord*. He writes: "The word of God makes us change our concept of realism: the realist is the one who recognizes in the word of God the foundation of all things." (10) The true realist is the person who is in touch with both the natural and supernatural landscapes of life.

Authentic contemplation requires a house built on the rock of objective truth. Similarly, authentic contemplation must rest on the objective truths of Catholic moral teaching.

The distorted philosophical underpinnings of moral relativism destroy any authentic approach to prayer and contemplation. Prayer that is based on a house built on the shifting sands of moral relativism collapses quickly.²

Every interdependent truth in our Catholic faith – the truths of the inspired Sacred Scriptures, the Creed and our Catholic doctrine, the Sacraments, the Ten Commandments and Catholic Moral Teaching, and the Saints and Mystics teaching on prayer – are the foundation of authentic contemplative prayer and creative evangelization that meets the signs and the crises of our times.

Prayer and silence give us the sensitivity and refinement to be led by the Holy Spirit to be confident in the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit working in us and working in and through the mission of the Church.

Let's open our hearts, minds, souls and lives wide to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit dwelling within us.

Through prayer and living lives grounded in the Gospel, may our hearts beat in rhythm with the humility, mercy and fortitude of Our Lord's most Sacred Heart.

Together, we ask the Holy Spirit to lead each of us to deeper prayer and silence and a deeper listening to the Lord.

Together, let's enter the Narrow Gate!

² For an effective analysis of the interdependence of Spiritual Theology and Moral Theology, see the works of Fr. Dennis J. Billy, CSSR: *Spirituality & Morality: Integrating Prayer and Action*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1996); *Conscience and Prayer: The Spirit of Catholic Moral Theology*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001); *Contemplative Ethics: An Introduction*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2011).

