

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

August 24, 2025

“The Narrow Gate”

Here’s a question for your reflection: How do you reconcile our **first reading from Isaiah**, which presents a picture of a great pilgrimage from across the face of the earth making their way to offer sacrifice in Jerusalem with our **Gospel reading from Luke**, in which Jesus refers to the narrow gate leading into the kingdom of heaven? How do we put these together?

Images can help, and the image I think of with these two readings is a simple **funnel**: a funnel has a large opening on one end to let in motor oil or cooking ingredients, and a small opening on the other end to let in a small amount of liquid. Both are parts of the same device.

So too, the plan of God welcomes everyone to come to the New Jerusalem of Heaven, but when we arrive, the gate is narrow. The narrow gate requires us to leave excess baggage behind so we have enough room to enter. The Letter to the Hebrews calls this “discipline”.

Are you willing to give up the excess baggage you’re carrying? That might include unconfessed sins, unforgiven errors, lingering resentments, suppressed anger, excessive love for comfort or material things. There’s lots we need to leave behind us.

In his Angelus address earlier today, Pope Leo says the image is a warning against presumption of God’s grace. “It is not enough to perform religious acts,” he says, “unless we change hearts,” he says. “The Lord does not want liturgy divorced from life. He is not pleased with sacrifices and prayers unless they lead to great love for others and justice from our brothers and sisters.”

Examples can help, and the example I hold for your reflection is Carlo Acutis. Carlo was an Italian boy who lived from 1991 to 2006. Before dying of leukemia, this young man was a sterling example of a missionary disciple. How did he live, and what example did he set for us?

This young man went to Mass every morning, and offered thanksgiving prayers after; he said a short rosary on the way to school, and offered up school work and small sacrifices like skipping lunch for sinners; he practiced charity with classmates and defended victims of bullying.

After study and homework, he visited the poor of Milan, Italy. He spent time in Eucharistic adoration, learned his catechism and bible; we made a good Confession every week, and gave up video games and TV during Lent.

He examined his conscience daily, and tried to grow in holiness. He also made a consecration to Our Lady before bed.

Carlo Acutis, who will be canonized on Sunday, September 7, entered heaven through the narrow gate. He knew that sin and material things are excess baggage that keep us out, and he was determined to cooperate with God and use the gifts of the Church go through it.

Before you say, "He was a saint; I'm not. He clearly had special gifts that I don't," consider this: This young man was no Superman. He simply desired with God's grace to pursue the narrow path to get to the narrow gate. He used the same tools available to each of us. Why can't we do the same if we want to do the same?

The Journey in Faith leads us to the New Jerusalem through the narrow gate. May Our Lady, Gate of Heaven, inspire us to follow the noble example set by this holy young man, and enter the narrow gate into the wide embrace of our Father.

God bless you.