

In this past Tuesday's Gospel we heard our Lord say: broad is the path to perdition (hell) and many there who take it; narrow is the gate that leads to life, and few there are who find it.

Do people who profess belief in the Lord take these words seriously? In fact, it seems that this exhortation from Jesus is often ignored or just outright disbelieved, cast aside, considered false. Amongst those who claim to believe in Christ, some, for example, cling (either desperately or nonchalantly) to the notion that everybody is going to Heaven; well maybe not some scoundrels like Hitler or priests or the guy over there that I don't like, but everybody else is and, well, *of course* I am. How easy it is to write off what our Lord actually says.

But almost certainly the main way that these words of God almighty Himself are cast aside is the insistence on living according to the supposedly absolute, gold standard of: what everybody else is doing. You must be modern, you must be contemporary, "old" or traditional = bad. To be like everybody else, to look around to see what everybody else is doing and then blindly follow it – ah yes, that is the smart thing to do. Everybody else is treating Sunday like just another day, a day for work, for sports, a day to get ahead in the world; well since everybody's doing it, it must be right; so yes, of course, I will obey and follow suit; no, no, Master Satan, I promise I will not use my mind to know truth and follow what is right and good and true; I promise I will blindly follow whatever is the current trend, just please don't hurt me. Everybody else is wearing this or that, or getting tattoos, or whatever the latest trend is – and boy I snap to to do the same, as if my life depends on it. Everybody else has this or that phone or TV or vehicle...well then, you must have it otherwise, oh God forbid, you'll be behind the times – what's wrong with you...*everybody's doing it!* There's nothing wrong with contraception or living together outside of marriage because ... yep, that's right: Everybody's doing it!! There's nothing wrong with same-sex relations, everybody (today) says so. Abortion, euthanasia? What century are you from? Everybody accepts these today. You have more than the socially acceptable 1.2 kids? You're weird, what are you thinking? Nobody does that today. No belief in God? Quitting the Church? Well, it's not so bad, a lot of people are doing it after all; it's the new thing, it's accepted today. The same thing applies in the Church – as long as we're doing whatever everybody else is doing, as long as it's contemporary, then it's ok. Step out of bounds, maybe with some practice aimed at increasing belief, reverence, and awe, and the outcry begins!

The *all-knowing* and all-loving God warned us, very explicitly, that: broad is the path to eternal misery **and many there are that choose it**. A person cannot claim to believe in God and yet set aside His words in favor of his own conclusions. A person cannot take the Lord or getting to Heaven seriously, he cannot claim to love God, while at the same time paying blind, absolute, and immediate homage to: what everybody's doing, what everybody says. No. To reach true and perfect freedom, true and perfect contentment, true and perfect union, true and perfect happiness and fulfillment – this blind, absolute adherence to what everybody is doing has to be set aside. The person must then engage their own mind to seek what is really true and then follow it.

Why such a fanatical clinging to whatever is popular? Fear is probably the main contributor. To not be "with the crowd" is dangerous to worldly good, to "safety" in the here and now. Do you really want to be controlled by fear, to have fear as your Master? Is that freedom? Pride is also involved. Man believes he knows he knows better than God. What else can such a thing be called other than foolish arrogance. This obsessive compulsion to follow the crowd also entails very short-term thinking; one must ignore the long-term consequences of this blind adherence because the consequence is trading never-ending ecstatic joy for never-ending misery.

Narrow is the path, the gate, to true, perfect, and everlasting happiness, narrow is the path home, and few there are who choose it. Who are those few who choose it? They are the saints. One way that our Lord's teaching on the broad and narrow paths can be characterized is as a choice between two rules of life:

- Blind obedience to what everybody says, what everybody else is doing, the trend of the day, or
- Studying and contemplating the lives of the saints, learning how to follow the narrow path.

One such saint is the French bishop and Doctor of the Church, St Francis de Sales from the late 1500's & early 1600's. St Francis de Sales wrote and taught especially in the area of the interior life. He also wrote on living by worldly standards in his book: Introduction to the Devout Life. Here is an excerpt:

“As soon as that your worldly friends perceive that you aim at leading a devout life, they will let loose endless shafts of mockery and misrepresentation upon you; the more malicious will attribute your change to hypocrisy, designing, or bigotry; they will affirm that the world having looked coldly upon you, failing its favor, you turn to God; while your friends will make a series of what, from their point of view, are prudent and charitable remonstrances. They will tell you that you are growing morbid; that you will lose your worldly credit, and will make yourself unacceptable to the world; they will prognosticate your premature old age, the ruin of your material prosperity; they will tell you that in the world you must live as the world does; that you can be saved without all this fuss; and. much more of the like nature.

My daughter, all this is vain and foolish talk: these people have no real regard either for your bodily health or your material prosperity. "If ye were of the world," the Savior has said, "the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

We have all seen men, and women, too, pass the whole night, even several in succession, playing at chess or cards; and what can be a more dismal, unwholesome thing than that? But the world has not a word to say against it, and their friends are nowise trou-bled. But give up an hour to meditation, or get up rather earlier than usual to prepare for Holy Communion, and they will send for the doctor to cure you of hypochondria or jaundice! People spend every night for a month dancing, and no one will complain of being the worse; but if they keep the one watch of Christmas Eve, we shall hear of endless colds and maladies the next day! Is it not as plain as possible that the world is an unjust judge; indulgent and kindly to its own children, harsh and uncharitable to the children of God?

We cannot stand well with the world save by renouncing His approval. It is not possible to satisfy the world's unreasonable demands: "John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say he hath a devil. The Son of Man is come eating and drinking, and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, the friend of publicans and sinners." Even so, my child, if we give in to the world, and laugh, dance, and play as it does, it will affect to be scandalized; if we refuse to do so, it will accuse us of being hypocritical or morbid. If we adorn ourselves after its fashion, it will put some evil construction on what we do; if we go in plain attire, it will accuse us of meanness; our cheerfulness will be called dissipation; our mortification dullness; and ever casting its evil eye upon us, nothing we can do will please it. It exaggerates our failings, and publishes them abroad as sins; it represents our venial sins as mortal, and our sins of infirmity as malicious. St. Paul says that charity is kind, but the world is unkind; charity thinks no evil, but the world thinks evil of everyone, and if it cannot find fault with our actions, it is sure at least to impute bad motives to them-whether the sheep be black or white, horned or no, the wolf will devour them if he can.

Do what we will, the world must wage war upon us. If we spend any length of time in confession, it will speculate on what we have so much to say about! if we are brief, it will suggest that we are keeping back something! It spies out our every act, and at the most trifling angry word, sets us down as intolerable. Attention to business is avarice, meekness mere silliness; whereas the wrath of worldly people is to be reckoned as generosity, their avarice, economy, their mean deeds, honorable. There are always spiders at hand to spoil the honeybee's comb.

Let us leave the blind world to make as much noise at it may, like a bat molesting the songbirds of day; let us be firm in our ways, unchangeable in our resolutions, and perseverance will be the test of our self-surrender to God, and our deliberate choice of the devout life.”

St Francis goes on immediately after this to speak of the need for courage. He gives encouragement, saying that at first this will all seem difficult and you will face temptations to turn back. But after persevering for a time,

this will pass. So now, what will we do? Listen to those who have made it, or those bound for misery? Listen to the saints and choose the narrow path, or listen to what everybody says and choose the broad path?

God bless you, Fr Kuhn