

I know a kid who recently took his life. He was a good high school student--likable fellow. One night when the rest of his family was away, he entered the garage, sat in the car, turned on the engine and just slipped away. People were devastated because they loved him and nobody knew he needed help; all they could figure is he made a sudden decision with permanent, tragic results. His parents, both Catholics, then found themselves praying in fear the question which opens today's Gospel--"Lord, will only a few be saved?" That question disturbs many of us for the sake of people we love. "What if my child quits going to church? What if someone leaves the Catholic Church? What if my kid does drugs? What happens to somebody who takes their own life?"

The first part of this gospel only heightens our fears. To answer the question about how many will be saved, Jesus says, "Strive to enter through the narrow door, for many will try to enter and will not be able." His parable recalls a homeowner who refuses shelter to people who thought they were friends. The meaning is clear. Some who think they are friends of God the homeowner will instead hear a hollow voice ringing through the locked door to heaven, "I don't know where you come from; go away from me, you evildoers!" Some will be thrown out of the kingdom of God. Coming from Jesus that warning sets us on edge even today. Some of us still fear a stern God just looking for an opportunity to catch us off guard and punish.

However, the Gospel ends on a remarkably different note. Jesus predicts: "People will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God." Suddenly it seems like that narrow door has been trampled down by a throng of people storming into heaven. What gives? Jesus is simply telling the old religious guard of Israel that their time is up. The "chosen" people are not the only chosen people. In fact, those who rely on their heritage alone will find the door of heaven quite narrow. But it opens wide for Gentiles as well, from the four corners of the world. That's us, those with a completely different religious lineage. The door is narrow for one group, wide for another.

When the catechism of the Catholic Church takes up the question of suicide, it says "Life is not ours to dispose of." But "we should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance." Many of our fears about salvation come from listening to the first part of this Gospel while ignoring the last. The narrow door excludes the narrow-minded. But it swings wide ready to embrace those who seek God in any way--even our wayward kids.