

I don't know why I keep these things, but I do. These are membership cards. Some are credit cards to buy gas; they charge me 4 cents a gallon extra for these. Some are Frequent Flyer I.D. cards which I've never needed at the airport. My bank gives me cards to remind me what my account number is. I have a voter I.D. card, a social security card, library cards, alumni cards, a telephone card, and--yes, even a video rental membership card. You see why I don't carry these in my wallet.

Almost all of these carry a price, or at least a risk. But they represent privileges for me if I meet the price.

The question in today's Gospel could be phrased this way: "What do you have to do to get a membership card for the kingdom of God?" They ask Jesus, "Will many people be saved? Do many have a valid I.D. card?"

In the Catholic Church our I.D. card looks like this. It's a baptismal certificate. It's larger, and not at all practical to carry in your wallet. We'll all be there on Judgment Day--millions of Catholics standing before the narrow gate, and we'll be holding up our certificates. This is the advantage, you see, of having a large one.

But before we have a chance to get there, Jesus tells this parable on us. Once there was a master of the house who locked the door and went to sleep. People arrived and wanted to get in. They knocked on the door, woke him up, and he said, "Leave me alone. I don't know you." They said, "Sure, you know us. We ate and drank with you, and we lived in those houses on the street where you used to come to teach." And the master said, "Leave me alone. I really don't know who you are."

You see, to get inside the house they had to be members. And they thought that eating, drinking, living on the right street, and listening to a teacher was enough. They thought they had a valid membership card. But they didn't. The master wanted more.

When the Catholics gather at the narrow gate at the end of the world, we'll find out that a baptismal certificate is not enough to get in. We'll find out that eating and drinking, even at the Eucharist, is not enough. We'll find out that living on the right street is not enough, listening to teachers--even in a Catholic school--is not enough. And for most of us, it won't come as a surprise.

This is why people do more. They pray, they make moral judgments, they get involved where they can.

Will we make it through the narrow gate? I think we will. Church-going people are basically good people. They love God; they love their neighbor--their membership is more than an I.D. card.

Still, Jesus says the gate is narrow. And he says it to keep us on our toes. If he'd said the gate is wide, we might be deceived. We might think that doing a little was enough. The gate is narrow, but the feast is large, and it awaits those whose membership is not just a card, but a complete way of life.