Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“How narrow is the gate that leads to life” (Matt 7:14).

2 Kgs 19:9b-11, 14-21, 31-35a, 36; Mt 7:6, 12-14

Today’s Gospel gathers various sayings attributed to Jesus. It is interesting to find the Golden Rule, to treat others as you want to be treated, grouped with warnings about pigs and dogs. These sayings may have been common Jewish slurs against pagans, especially Romans.

A non-Jew like the Canaanite woman Jesus meets in Matthew 15:21 got this pejorative when she asked Jesus to heal her daughter. “We don’t give the children’s food to dogs.” In other stories, swine were considered unclean and associated with the Romans, as in the story of the Gerasene demoniac whose evil spirits rush into a “legion” of swine that drowns in the lake (Matt. 8:23 ff).

Whether Jesus ever used these slurs, we get the message that discernment is crucial. The story in Matthew 15 seems to suggest that he rejected such verbal abuse when he recognized the mother’s plea for her sick daughter as a sign that he had to expand his mission beyond Israel.

Discernment includes timing and readiness. Don’t waste the Good News on people who are not ready for it. Wait until they are ready, and then deliver it. Jesus used parables to screen his audiences into casual listeners and serious seekers. Parables entertain some and call others to discipleship. Discernment reveals where grace meets readiness. A hungry dog will consume pearls along with garbage, so save your words for a graced moment and a discerning heart.

A final parable about a narrow gate in today’s Gospel reading completes the collection of sayings. Conversion is decisive and unique to each person. The narrow gate knows us and fits us perfectly. It hones us down to pure commitment, stripping away the self-serving accommodations and hidden reservations that lessen the risks of full surrender. Only our authentic self will pass through it. Jesus wants the real you. If you cannot commit, you are not ready. You are the camel that cannot pass through the eyes of the needle.

Rather than discourage us, today’s Gospel sharpens our desire to find and know Jesus, the pearl of great price, the treasure in the field, the prize above every other prize. No lover should settle for second best. No seeker of truth should stop short of the purest ideal. This is not a minor goal, but the very purpose of life, to pursue and take hold of God and everything that is holy and eternal.

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