Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Last weekend two of our parishioners were called through death to eternal life. For one it was the moment that he had been waiting for, knowing that his body was gradually wearing out. For the other it was sudden and unexpected. When someone close to us dies without warning we cannot help but wonder what it would be like if that happened to us. Would we be ready to be called home? Have we taken most of the opportunities that came our way to live our lives fully and for others?

Life is full of windows of opportunity when we are given the chance to do something before that opportunity passes. There are many doors that are inviting us in before they are closed again in front of us. Jesus speaks about some of those in our gospel today. He took his hearers by surprise. One of them asked if there was only going to be a few saved; perhaps thinking that he must surely be one of those few.

But Jesus doesn't allow him or anyone else to become complacent. He urges us to try our best to enter by the narrow door. He urges us to make sure that we are near the front of the line, not dragging our heels at the back. What is that narrow door? In our world today it might be taking a stance that is unpopular and against the tide. It might be standing up for the forgotten in our community. It might be lending a hand to someone that everyone else has wiped off as hopeless. It might be speaking up for justice and working for change.

Choosing the narrow door today might well be holding on to the faith that has been handed down to us and choosing to deepen that faith by prayer and reflection. It might be choosing to support and serve our faith community in whatever way we feel called to do so.

Jesus tells us today that if we don't take the chance to enter the narrow door when that opportunity is given to us, then we might find that it is locked. We can't say to the Lord that we have the right to come in when we have only been bystanders and spectators to the activities that he has wanted us to be involved in.

But God in his mercy constantly calls us and people all around us to come to know of his love for them and respond to that love. God calls people from east and west from north and south to come and share in the feast that he has prepared for us. But we can't take all that for granted. Jesus tells us that there are those who are now last will be first and those first who will be last.

This weekend we have been invited to share a simple lunch with our fellow parishioners. It is a window of opportunity for us to come to know each other a little better. It is an opportunity to hear each other's stories

and to become a little more aware of the different gifts that God has shared with each of us. It is a window of opportunity to get to know some of the people who have recently joined our parish. It is an opportunity to reach out in friendship to some of those who sit at the table of the Eucharist with us

How do we make sure that we have a place at table when the Eucharist comes to its fulfillment? I suppose it gets back to those windows of opportunity. Australia's patron, Saint Mary of the Cross Mackillop can teach us a lot about taking the opportunities that come our way. She told her sisters to never see a need without trying to do something about it. She wasn't into changing the world all at once. But she did believe that God gives us chances to show our love for others in a whole host of ways every day. It is when the needs of others are met in small ways that bit by bit the world does become a different place and a better place to live in.

I find for myself that the Spirit is at work each day prompting me to do this or that, reminding me of a phone call that I need to make or a visit that is overdue. I can ignore those promptings, or I can respond. I can take the windows of opportunity that are presented to me or I can miss them. If I take them, then I am often carried to a place that I didn't expect to go. If I miss them, I stay where I am in my selfishness.

On Tuesday night The Parish Pastoral Council took the opportunity to trial the next stage of the Plenary Council: The Discerning stage. We were invited into times of prayerful silence and respectful listening to what each person shared from their time of prayer. We prayed and listened to one another about how God is calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is humble, healing and merciful. We found the process worked and we think that many parishioners could well take part in that process.

When I am trying to listen to the ways that God may be leading me, I can still get lost. I sometimes tell God that surely there must be a better way to get things done. My questions get more frequent when the going gets hard and it involves suffering. Today's letter to the Hebrews explores some of those things. We read there that God treats us as children who need to be tested. "Suffering is part of your training; it bears fruit in peace and goodness." we are told. But the letter ends with a word of encouragement. "So hold up your limp arms and steady your trembling knees and smooth out the path you tread; there the injured limb will not be wrenched, it will grow strong again."

May we take the windows of opportunity that come our way this week, so that the Lord may lead us to where he wants us to be.