

## It's NOT "Festival Seating"

**Intro.** In another lifetime, many rock concerts were general admission. There were no reserved seats. It was called "festival seating." When the doors opened it was a mad dash to the best seats. It was kind of fun until at a concert in Cincinnati, I think, a number of people were seriously hurt in the stampede. From today's Gospel, it sounds like Heaven is not festival seating or even reserved seating but more like "*call ahead*" seating. Our preparation is done *before* we get there.

**I.** The questioner wasn't looking for a specific number, maybe just a ballpark idea – a few or a lot. Did she or he have a *real chance* to get into heaven. The Lord didn't respond to the question. Instead he tried to open up the thinking to more inclusion rather than more exclusion. [M. McGlone, NCR]. The path

to salvation is a different path, with a narrow gate. It will take a lot of strength and some will not make it. How strong does one have to be to get through a narrow gate! Anybody ever gone to the grand opening of a store or Christmas shopping at midnight on Thanksgiving? It is very difficult for a crowd of people to get through a few, small doors. The parable shifts the initial image from a gate to the door of the heavenly banquet and getting in before it is shut and locked. Some people will stand outside saying, "Hey. Open up." From inside the Master says, "I don't recognize you." "You know. It's me; Mike. Remember? We used to 'do' Communion sometimes." Sorry, no.

The Lord's teaching is that a lot of people are getting through that narrow door to the heavenly banquet who we don't expect. Matthew's gospel says they

will come from the “east and the west.” Luke’s gospel says, *not only* from the east and the west but also from the “north and the south.” From all over the world. In the first reading Isaiah prophesies the same thing: The Lord says, “I come to gather nations of every language...from Tarshish, Put, Lud...” Plug in any country today. Who gets into the heavenly banquet, gets saved is not our decision. Our focus is on a decision to follow a less traveled road or the easiest one. The freeway or a two-lane road with occasional detours.

**Concl.** How do we get in through that narrow gate? We need to train for it. But it’s is not about physical strength; who can lift the most weight or run faster. It is about the *spiritual* strength necessary **not** to take the easy and wide path in life. Many are already walking leisurely that one and calling us to

join them. And it is very tempting. The question is not “will only a *few* be saved.” The question is “*How* can we be saved, get to heaven?” God doesn’t put a limit on the *number* of people to be saved or *who* gets into heaven. *We* try to limit God’s mercy based on our selfishness or prejudices or false interpretations of a few scripture passages. The door to heaven would never be shut because Heaven is *full*, but because *we have chosen* the easy way or waited too late to get there. **Some of us who think we’re in will not be; and some who think we have no chance, will be. It’s door number three, the one less taken.**

Fr. Michael Pendergraft

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