No one is excluded from the Kingdom of God. He invites everyone to join his people, to share in his life, to live in love. Taken together, that’s the obvious theme of the first reading, the psalm, and the Gospel.

Yet what stays with me is the dialog from today’s Gospel:

“Lord, will only a few people be saved?”
And Jesus replies, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, which many will attempt, but will not be strong enough.”

And then there are those people in the parable, those who were rejected by the master of the house.

- What is it that makes me hear not the good news, but the warning?
- What was it that caused those people who were knocking to be sent away?
- What is it that would keep us from joining the people of God, from entering through the narrow gate?

For me, and I think for many people, the problem is sloth.

I don’t mean sitting on the couch all day with a bag of chips in an old dirty t-shirt and a pair of sweats, watching reruns of old football games. That may be laziness, but it’s not necessarily sloth.

Let me explain.

A few days ago I was listening to the radio in my car. A woman was telling a story about her experiences as mother.
She had three boys, and from the beginning she devoted her life to them. She was, she admits, obsessed with trying to enrich their lives with memorable activities.

- Birthday’s became major events and took days to prepare. Everything was home-made.
- Everyday activities like coloring pictures would turn into big art projects.
- After Thanksgiving only one thing mattered: going full-out to get ready for Christmas.
- And on and on it went.

Her husband, on the other hand, didn’t share her obsession. At first he was involved, but after each of the boys was born, he would become a little more distant.

It didn’t sound like they talked about what was wrong, though she implied that her husband tried in the early years to talk about her obsession. But she just wanted him to become more involved with the boys, and he just wanted some time to himself. By the time her oldest was eleven, their marriage was over and they divorced.

Yet the woman telling the story didn’t seem to regret the divorce for any reason other than it was hard on her boys. That was how she left it. She thought they’d turned okay, and that she had done her best as a mother.

There was no reflection on what she and her husband could have done differently. It just didn’t seem to matter.

I turned off the radio.
I had just heard a parable of sloth ... and it was tragic.

Sloth is a spiritual not a physical vice like lust or gluttony. Both laziness and busyness can be outward manifestations of sloth: but, by themselves, they are not sloth.
We are made for a relationship with God. If we are slothful, we have chosen to find fulfillment in something other than God. If we are slothful, we are apathetic about our relationship with God: we don’t care, it doesn’t matter.

In the parable of sloth that I head on the radio, the woman and the man fell in love and were married. At that point they had everything they needed to grow in their relationship, but they weren’t willing to do the work that it takes to make a relationship grow and flourish.

The work that it takes to keep a relationship healthy is the Narrow Gate. If you don’t do the work because you don’t care, ... because it’s boring or because something else seems more important or more interesting, then the relationship will die.

When we habitually avoid working on our relationship with God, we are slothful.

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Can you be busy and yet be slothful? Of course! Being busy is sometimes the easiest way to avoid a relationship.

I think that’s the problem of being “spiritual but not religious.” Religious life is the work we have to do in order to keep ourselves in relationship with God.

Do that work with firm purpose and our relationship with him will flourish.

That woman and her husband, they had been married for a dozen years, maybe more. They journeyed together ... yet at the end they strangers.

_After the master of the house has arisen and locked the door, then will you stand outside knocking and saying, ‘Lord, open the door for us.’ He will say to you in reply, ‘I do not know where you are from.’_

There is a great promise and a great hope in today’s readings, but maybe it’s okay if the warning remains as well.