

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER “A” 2020

Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus used concrete images to help his followers understand who He really is. For example, Jesus said:

- *“I am the Bread of Life” (John 6:35)*
- *“I am the Light of the World” (John 8:12)*
- *“I am the Vine; you are the branches.” (John 15:5)*

In today’s Gospel passage, we heard Jesus say, *“I am the sheep gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture”* (John 10:9).

When Jesus said, *“I am the sheep gate...”* He knew what image would immediately come to the minds of His hearers. In Biblical times, when a shepherd brought his sheep into town, there was a fenced-in pen with a solid gate where the sheep were kept at night. This pen was called a sheepfold.

But when the sheep were grazing out in the fields, the shepherd had to improvise. He had to create a makeshift sheepfold by building a pen with walls made of layers of flat stones or with branches and brambles. The pen had a very narrow opening on one side where the sheep could enter and leave. Once the sheep were safely in the pen, the shepherd would lie across that opening. The shepherd literally would become the door or gate for the sheepfold. As the door, the shepherd could control the coming and going of the sheep and also keep the flock safe from wolves and other predators. This is what Jesus was alluding to when He said, *“I am the sheep gate...”* or another way of saying this: *“I am the door.”*

To get the full impact of this image, we might ask ourselves: what do we know about doors?

First of all, we know that there are all kinds of doors... all sizes... made of different materials. Some are warm and welcoming. Others are cold and frightening.

As I was working on this homily, I allowed my mind to wander and I started picturing a variety of doors and what they said to me. For me, here are a few of the images that came to my mind.

- I pictured the door to my family home where I grew up, and the kitchen door that we used more often than the front door. It brought memories of warmth, family, acceptance, love and safety.
- I pictured the doors of my parish church where I was baptized, received my First Communion and Confirmation, where my family and I worshipped for many years and were nurtured in our faith, and the parish church from which we buried our dad in 1991.
- I pictured the gates and doors of the parish school and playground which reminded me of the beginnings of my education, old friends, fun and community.
- I pictured the doors and gates of the seminary that were part of my incredible journey to the priesthood and the wonderful priest professors who taught me.
- I pictured the revolving door at some big department store or hotel, going round and round—are we coming or going in life?

- I pictured a drawbridge and a great, wooden castle gate—an invitation to imagine and dream.
- I pictured the automatic gates of a gated community—again that provide security and safety or keep people out.
- I pictured a prison door that slams shut behind you that connotes fear, being locked in and confined.
- I even pictured the little doors of an Advent calendar which always brings to mind the sense of waiting, anticipation, and surprise.

When you allow your mind to wander, what images come to your mind when you hear the word “door”?

What else about doors? Well, we also know that:

- Doors keep us safe.
- Doors may reveal a mystery on the other side. We never know for sure what we might find on the other side of a door. I think of that old television game show, Monty Hall’s *“Let’s Make A Deal,”* where a contestant would have a chance to choose one of three doors, behind which was some kind of mystery surprise.
- Doors indicate a movement in our lives. When we pass through a door, we are going from one place to another; it connects us with what’s next. Doors always lead somewhere. If we know that doors lead us somewhere and that doors indicate a movement in our lives, then **education** certainly can be a door and so can **opportunity**, and maybe even a **New Year. For believers, certainly prayer**, the Bible, Faith, the Church, and the Sacraments would be doors.

Having said all this about doors, now we can understand what Jesus meant when He said that He is the sheep gate or the door.

Doors keep us safe. If Jesus is the door, then Jesus came to keep us safe. Jesus was born into our world and into our human flesh to defend us against the dangers of the devil who *“prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour”* (1 Peter 5:8). Jesus died in order to be the door that protects us from the perils of sin.

Doors often reveal a mystery on the other side.

Jesus is the doorway to the mystery of God the Father. When the Apostle Philip asked Jesus *“Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us”* (John 14:8), Jesus answered, *“Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don’t know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you?”* (John 14:9). If we want to know who God is, if we want to behold the glory of God, Jesus, the sheep gate or the door, opens and reveals to us the mystery

of God, the mystery about ourselves, the plan for creation and redemption.

Doors lead us somewhere. If Jesus is the SHEEPGATE or the DOOR that leads somewhere, just think where and how Jesus leads us.

- Jesus leads us to truth and meaning by His holy Word.
- Jesus leads us to the refreshing waters of Baptism and the other Sacraments.
- Jesus leads us to the protective shelter of the Church

- Jesus leads us to more abundant life than we ever dreamed of.
- Jesus leads us to His Father's House and Kingdom
- Jesus leads us to eternal life and happiness.

Jesus, the door or the sheep gate, offers us all these blessings. Which brings me to the final aspect of a door, and that is a door can be opened or can be closed and locked. Only each one of us can make that choice.

There is a well known story about William Holman Hunt's famous painting, *The Light of this World*. I am sure that most of you have seen a print of this painting. It depicts Jesus preparing to knock on an overgrown and long-unopened door, illustrating the verse from Revelation 3:20 : “*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.*”

As the story goes, when William Holman Hunt was ready to unveil his painting for the first time, he called family and friends together to be the first to see it. It was pretty quiet as each person stood there and drank in the deep feeling that painting conveys. Then, people began to comment on what impressed them about the painting.

One friend said hesitantly, “*Holman, it's a beautiful painting. But didn't you forget something?*”

“*What did I forget?*” asked Holman Hunt.

The friend said, *“There’s no handle on the door.”*

To which the artist simply replied, *“Oh! No, I didn’t forget the handle. When Jesus knocks on the door of your heart, one must open one’s heart to Christ from within — He will not force His way inside.”*

Brothers and sister, Jesus is the sheep gate or the door that will keep us safe and will reveal the mystery of God, His Kingdom and His plan for us. Jesus is the door who will lead us to so many incredible blessings. Jesus is just waiting for each one of us to open that door.