

4th Sunday of Easter, 3 May 2020

Gospel: John 10:1-10

Homily: Fr. Ken

In the Gospel, we are presented with the image of a gatekeeper. Today, the term "gatekeeper" is understood in a variety of ways. A gatekeeper is not simply a person who guards a gate. The term is also used to refer to someone who controls access to important people or services, or someone who gives permissions, or who has power over the flow of information.

A mother who does not permit her child to cross the street alone is acting as a gatekeeper. A secretary who decides which calls to put through to the boss is a gatekeeper. In journalism, a gatekeeper is someone who decides which stories will be published, and which will be ignored.

On the internet, search engines such as Google can be described as gatekeepers as they decide which websites to include or exclude when information is sought. Within the Catholic Church, in those countries that have developed effective policies to protect those at risk, every parish and diocese has a safeguarding person to act as a gatekeeper, monitoring who is authorized to work with children and vulnerable adults.

So, gatekeepers are very influential people or institutions. They affect our lives, make decisions for us; they exercise a role of care, and at times even interfere in our lives.

In this morning's Gospel, Jesus describes himself in terms of gatekeeping. He first states that he is someone who is known to the gatekeeper, someone who can be trusted. The gatekeeper recognizes Jesus and grants him access into the sheepfold. And, the sheep recognize his voice; they follow where he leads. Jesus is known and trusted.

When this first parable is not understood, Jesus changes tack slightly, this time calling himself the gate, though the description he gives also fits that of a gatekeeper. Jesus acts so as to keep people safe, to give freedom, to allow people to come and go. He enables them to be fed, giving access to pasture, and he gives life to the full. Jesus compares himself to others whose aim is only to exploit and destroy. We are familiar with more popular images associated with Jesus: he is the light, the way, the truth, the good shepherd, and so on.

But to call him the gate, or the gatekeeper, gives us much to reflect on. This idea powerfully describes Jesus' role of giving access to what nourishes and sustains us, of giving us freedom to explore, and of safeguarding us from all that would exploit or destroy us. Jesus is the gatekeeper who offers us life to the full.

Today we are faced with a whole host of people and organizations who would like to be the gatekeepers of our lives, people who want to determine what we should know or not know; who want to decide what we should buy, whom we should vote for, where we should go for vacation, what values we should live by, what goals we should strive towards. There are many competing voices. And, as Jesus warned, there are many who seek entry into our lives who in fact are only in it for themselves, and who, if we allow them, will end up depriving us of life, and peace, and happiness.

Jesus invites us to let him be our gatekeeper. Jesus offers us freedom; he offers to nourish, to satisfy our deepest needs, to keep us safe and to give us life to the full.

Today, it is we who are called to recognize the voice of Jesus, and to decide to follow him wherever he leads us. We learn to recognize his voice through spending time with him: through prayers, through the sacraments, through his word. And we gain courage and confidence to follow him through our communion with others who also put their trust in him, through active membership in our St. Rita parish family.

Jesus warns of the need to be discerning in whom we follow and whom we trust. We can pray to be blessed with good shepherds and trustworthy gatekeepers. But, more than that, Jesus also asks us to follow where he leads. That is, he asks us in turn to be good shepherds who lay down our lives for others, and to be caring gatekeepers, to serve rather than to dominate; to give life, rather than to exploit; to lead others to greater freedom, rather than to diminish them; to give of our time and talents to help people to find genuine fulfillment of their needs, rather than just offer the brush off of pious platitudes and pat answers. Jesus invites us to be like himself, to be good shepherds and trustworthy gatekeepers to each other.

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