Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time, C

Old St. Pat’s, 2022

One of the most celebrated and effective literary devices

 for developing a storyline

 actually used by Luke in today’s gospel

 is the secret, narrow, or hidden passageway,

 sometimes deployed as the magical, or sealed door.

 Think back on the famous door

 in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*

that opened into a wondrous kingdom*;*

 the tiny passageway in Wonderland that required

 Alice to consume magical cake and liquid in order to enter;

 and of course, Tolkien’s secret entrance to the mines of M**ó**ria

 or hidden keyhole to the Lonely Mountain.

 These fictional passageways serve as potent metaphors

for life’s journey, for choosing to grow and change

often at great risk.

 A favorite example of such a metaphorical journey

 is the 1994 movie “[Stargate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stargate),” that eventually morphed

 into a huge entertainment franchise.

 In the original film

 a fictional wormhole between two universes

 opened the way to multiple evolutions in the story

 in which lead characters

and even an entire oppressed people

boldly chose to journey a difficult path

that eventually resulted in both

 personal and societal liberations.

The point of these mystical passageways is precisely to choose.

 Few writers understood that better than C.S. Lewis

 author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*

 who in a BBC broadcast during World War II,

before he wrote his celebrated novels noted:

The hall is a place to wait in, a place from which to try the various doors, not a place to live in. For that purpose the worst of the rooms … is … preferable. It is true that some people may find they have to wait in the hall for a considerable time, while others feel certain almost at once which door they must knock at. I do not know why there is this difference, but I am sure God keeps no one waiting unless He sees that it is good for him to wait. When you do get into your room you will find that the long wait has done you some kind of good which you would not have had otherwise. But you must regard it as waiting, not as camping. You must keep on praying for light.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Most of us have not had direct experiences

 with enchanted doors that require us to shrink

 magical wardrobes that open up into fantastic kingdoms

 or cosmic wormholes that can transport us to another universe

 though we have all had our share

 of waiting in hallways or lines

 to board a plane or enter an event.

 In a contemporary twist on the “narrow gate” in today’s gospel

 one writer has suggested that this pivotal metaphor

 might best be reimaged

 as a [modern turnstile](https://twojourneys.org/sermon/the-narrow-gate-jesus-commands-us-to-enter-the-kingdom-matthew-sermon-22-of-151/).

 While some might consider this a little banal if not irreverent

 I think the analogy holds a lot of promise.

While this $300 million + industry is rapidly evolving

 from speed gates to full height doors

 from tripod designs to high tech optical designs

 whatever their design they provide [multiple and distinct benefits](https://www.haywardturnstiles.com/learning-center/turnstile-uses-and-benefits/)

 enhanced security

 increased efficiency for entrances and exits

 enforcing required entry fees

 and providing efficient analysis of attendance.

 From a more theological perspective,

and I know it sounds a little odd to theologize about a turnstile

turnstiles take each individual seriously

 count each soul as significant

 and insure that no one’s presence is overlooked or ignored.

 Furthermore, as one blogger notes,

 they strip us of excess baggage:

 something I have experienced too often

 when taking the Blue Line to O’Hare

 and trying to maneuver my roller bag through

 these unforgiving obstacles.

 As in any spiritual endeavor

entering a turnstile also involves certain risks:

 the possibility of getting stuck and embarrassed,

 of sustaining personal injury

 and even the remote possibility of death: it has happened.

 Engaging in this spiritual daydreaming

Might have the unfortunate result

 Of conjuring golden turnstiles at the pearly gates

 that control entry into God’s heavenly courts …

 Multiple cartoonists have gone in that direction

 And there are even several sounds, such as

 Marcus Gilvear’s “Turnstiles to Heaven,” and

Roger Manning’s “Turnstile at Heaven’s Gate”

 That can serve as a soundtrack to these daydreams.

 But this modern metaphor is not intended

to summon images of physical barriers to God,

 or spur visions of heavenly turnstiles

 even if they are wrought from the purest of gold.

 No, for the narrow gate in the gospels is not a thing:

 it is a person.

 Jesus is the true narrow gate through which we must pass.

Now of course that could sound quite daunting

 I mean who could get through a Jesus turnstile

 given his human perfection, and godly holiness.

 But the irony is that the God of Jesus Christ makes this

a very generous passageway

 as made perfectly clear in today’s readings.

 Thus that shocking passage from Isaiah

 in which the God of the chosen people,

 who originally deemed the Israelites his only beloved

now extends the covenant to every known nation,

 designates gentiles as siblings to the Israelites

 even announcing that some of them

 will be chosen as priests and Levites

 giving them access to the very inner sanctum of God.

 Similarly in today’s gospel

 Jesus looks beyond his inner circle

 when envisioning the vastness of God’s beloved

 going so far to clarify that a certain group –

 who thought they could rely upon their social connections

 and longtime chumminess with Jesus,

 after all they frequently shared a beer & a burger

 with the Only Begotten –

 would not make it through his divine scanner

 while hoards of others would be invited

 to recline at table with him.

While that might sound like a contradiction,

 legions of outsiders crashing the Jesus banquet

 while old tavern buddies never make it past sacred security,

 Luke’s vocabulary here solves this riddle,

 for he has Jesus rejecting those whom he calls “evildoers”

 a phrase more accurately translated as

 purveyors of iniquity

workers of unrighteousness,

 peddlers of injustice.

 It is only those who uphold the justice of God

 no matter what their religious affiliation

 their spiritual alliances

 their belief systems

 who will pass through the Jesus gate

 And be deemed as worthy of salvation.

 Pope Francis has explicitly confirmed this justice key

 when in his 2013 encyclical “The Joy of the Gospel”

 spoke of those who do not consider themselves

 part of any religious tradition

 yet who sincerely seek the truth

 as “precious allies in the commitment

 to defending human dignity

 in building peaceful coexistence between peoples

 and in protecting creation.”[[2]](#endnote-2)

 Francis has continued to stress this point

 noting that doing good is key to redemption

 and not just having a baptismal certificate

buried somewhere in a scrapbook.

 This is completely resonant with the famous

 sheep and goats’ passage in Matthew 25.

 Nowhere in that passages does Jesus say that judgment

 is based on a fulsome prayer life,

 ritual purity

 or religious affiliation.

 Rather, it is all based on what we do … the justice we enact.

 Thus all prayer, all worship, all religious affiliation

 Must be in service of that call to unequivocal love.

The holy irony in this revelation

 is that the narrow gate

 can properly be understood

 not only as the person of Jesus

 but more broadly as the justice enacted in his name.

 So when we overlook injustice

 ignore those suffering prejudice, exclusion and diminishment

 the narrow gate closes,

 the turnstile locks, the door is sealed.

 Thus it is incumbent upon us to seek out

 wise gate liberators

 gifted door openers

 vigilant turnstile operators

 who lift the veil on the marginalized,

 the downtrodden

 the overlooked

 And reveal how to embrace them as living keys

 as spiritual locksmiths

 for prying open that godly gate

 often rusted shut by our own prejudice.

As some of you know, one of my ministries for my community

 is promoting the canonization of the Capuchin Solanus Casey

 Who died in 1957 and was beatified in 2017.

 Solanus was an unlikely gate opener

 since he failed out of the diocesan seminary

 and was encouraged to take an intellectually

less rigorous path - like joining the Capuchins.

 Even with us, he struggled.

 An obviously holy guy, they eventually ordained him

 But because of his academic difficulties

he was never allowed to perform public sacraments

 no marriages, no baptisms, no confession

 at first not even allowed to preach.

Not knowing what to do with this simplex priest,

 Superiors assigned him to the ministry of porter:

 Yep … he answered the door.

While another might have labored grudgingly at this task

 Solanus brought unpretentious joy and care

 in response to every knock, every ring of the doorbell.

 Eventually he became the reason why people came to the door.

 People of every social status

 from across the religious spectrum, including atheists

 but especially the sick, the broken,

the downtrodden, the hopeless

 sought the balm of his presence.

When Solanus died in 1957 over 20,000 paid their last respects

 And when he was beatified in November of 2017

 70,000 filled Detroit’s Ford Field in gratitude

 for this simple man

 who literally and figuratively

 opened for multitudes the very door to the sacred:

 the unlikeliest of God’s turnstiles.

**MUSIC**

In today’s second reading

 we are advised to be disciplined in gospel ways

 disciplined to practice justice

 to expand our narrow minds and hearts

so that we might honor those society diminishes

casts aside and overlooks

 For, ironically, they hold the key to our own salvation

 For when we open a door for them

They in in turn open the door of the just Christ for us

 Whom we embraced as Lord and God for ever and ever.

1. Mere Christianity (New York: Touchstone, 1996), pp. 11-12. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. *Evangelii Gaudium,* no. 258. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)