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)