

Some people simply are not sure --- not sure of what they think, not sure of what they feel, not sure of who they are. This was never a problem with Jesus of Nazareth. He is calmly, quietly sure about what he feels, what he thinks, and above all who he is ... and he's not shy about expressing it.

He says, "I'm bread and a good shepherd"(in fact, *the* good shepherd). I'm your way to the Father, the new temple, God's truth, and ... oh yes, today something else. I'm the gate."

Gates are important. Gates, doors, portals are ways in. During open hours, it's important that both Sacred Heart church's main doors be wide open. So people can know it's easy to get in. Cities put arches and welcome signs by their gateways. "Welcome. Come in!"

Sometimes gates are kept closed. Gated neighborhoods don't want everyone in. Gated school playgrounds don't want everyone welcome. Security gates at airports aren't open for everyone, just people making flights. I once heard a Berkeley professor lecture half an hour on Victorian gates and doors. The yards always have fences, and a gate ... closed. And in Victorian homes the door is usually quite small, to the side, and almost always protected by porches. You would expect this from that age of discretion, privacy, misgivings about intimacy. You are welcome, but not completely, not entirely.

Some gates you wouldn't want to open. A wisdom figure told one of the parish staff when you knock knock knock on a door and it won't open ... it may well be God knows what's on the other side isn't good for you, so he's holding it shut. Sometimes in a conversation a gate is closed. You're warned: "Don't go there."

On the other hand, some gates were made to be open. A friend mentioned his nervous, much put-off visit to an AA meeting. When he got to the door and saw all these people, he started to turn away. "I don't belong here," he thought. And then several of his friends spotted him. "Come in, come in," they kept gesturing. That's the heart of Jesus. Even look at that door from a distance and it swings open and Jesus is at your side trying to invite you in.

Jesus makes a great gate ... to the Church, to God, to the communion of saints, to a holier life, because he's never locked. He's always open. Every sinner has 24 hours, 7 days a week access to not the front porch but the Heart, and through that heart to divine mercy. My own heart gate might be closed to you, your heart might be closed to me, our hearts might be closed to our own selves. But never Jesus. And in Jesus we can find a secret way into each other. Many parents, children, friends, enemies, sneak into each other's hearts unannounced and leave anonymous blessings ... by entering through the heart of Jesus and praying for estranged loved ones.

I said gates are great for getting into places, but they're also great if you want to get out. When I go to the jail, and hear the heavy metal doors slam shut behind me, I get claustrophobic. I enter, do my business ... and then am so grateful to take several deep breaths of the fresh air when I'm outside again. One day you'll be dying. You'll be stuck, and every door will seem closed, and your world will be no bigger than a shared room or a hospital bed. Won't you be happy to look up to a face that loves you, and hear a voice, that you know so well, whispering to you: "Don't worry. I'm here, and I'm the gate."