

There was a TV show called “Let’s Make a Deal”. I’m sure many of you remember good old Monty Hall up in the audience making a deal with someone, trading them cash for some silly thing they brought with them to get them noticed. Then he would bring them down to the stage inviting contestants to choose a door, behind which may be a wonderful grand prize, a mediocre prize, or a sort of gag gift. Some were asked to give up some really nice prizes for a chance at the big prize door. Some won big while others were sorely disappointed. Doors can lead to all kinds of things and all kinds of places. We also have many doorways in life from which to choose and Jesus uses this image of a gate or door in today’s gospel.

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday, as you might have noticed from the Psalm and the Gospel reading. On this day, in all 3 lectionary years, we focus on the image and meaning of what it means for Jesus to be Shepherd of His sheep. (Which is why I refer to myself as the sheepdog. JESUS is the Shepherd of the sheep. I am simply a sheepdog assisting Him by nipping at the heels of the sheep to keep them close to Him.) There is perhaps no more familiar or comforting image for Christians than that of the shepherd. Folks seem very fond of the image of the lamb over Jesus’ shoulders being carried back to safety after having been lost.

It is later in this chapter that Jesus refers to Himself as the Good Shepherd but here He refers to Himself as the gate, or other translations have door, to the sheepfold. In the fields of Israel where sheep are taken to graze and water, there are sheepfolds made of stone in many fields. These stone pens were built many years ago and are kept up by shepherds to be used by shepherds for their sheep. They are a safe enclosure for sheep to be in at night. Sheep are about as dumb as animals come so it doesn’t take much for them to get into trouble. Having a secure place for them is important. So, these pens are simple stone walls high enough to keep out most thieves and predators. The only opening is a narrow opening just wide enough for a wide, wooly sheep to walk through. Some had gates or doors, others did not. For those that did not, the shepherd became the gate by placing himself in the doorway in a sitting position. Anything coming in or out, literally, had to go through the shepherd. That’s a pretty good protection plan with an armed guard not at the door but AS the door. It’s the same protection plan we have in place now if we would only follow the instruction in this lesson about listening and following the voice of our Shepherd, Jesus where He leads us. But sometimes we don’t. We go our own way.

As I said before, we have many doorways in life from which to choose. Many of them are like the thieves and bandits which prey on unsuspecting folks, with false promises, catchy phrases, behind which may be many frauds and scams. How many internet warnings for spam & scam mail are there out there, especially in this time of Covid 19, and that’s only one source of such bandits and thieves? Many of those doorways are quite enticing, perhaps glass doorways through which one sees greener pastures, success, status, a quick fix for problems, a quick fortune, etc. One thing I learned about greener pastures when I owned a lawn care business years ago is that they only look greener from far away. When you get right on top of them, they have as many little bare spots and problems as the one you were hoping to trade in. And that’s true for much of life – the one who seems to have it better, often only seems to have it better.

But there is one doorway that leads to abundant life, one through which we are led to still waters, green pastures and the restoration of our souls. In fact, there is only one doorway that leads to abundant life, still waters, green pastures and the restoration of our souls. But to choose this door means giving up what may be behind other doors just as it would have been with Monty on Let’s Make A Deal. With Monty, there was no guarantee of a good deal behind the door you chose. It was a risk. With Jesus, there is a promise of an abundant life because He staked His life on it. So as you go through life choosing doors to go through, you can choose the door that leads you to an

abundant life where your needs are met in many ways and means or you can take a risk on a door or doors that may give you what you wanted but don't supply what you really need.

Which door will you choose? Door number 1 or the sheep gate, Jesus? Amen