

4th Sunday of Easter A May 15, 2011 – Fr. Gerald Haemmerle

Every year on this Sunday we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday and we always read from the 10th chapter of John's gospel. Interestingly this year Jesus does not clearly say "I am the good shepherd" as he will say in next year's gospel, but he says "I am the gate." That is the metaphor I would like to play with today.

A gate or a door can be many things. A gate or a door can be closed or even locked, and it can be open. A closed door can keep people out. Sometimes we want to do that for protection. But a closed door can keep all people out. And a closed door can keep people inside, preventing them from going out.

On the other hand, an open door allows people to enter, even welcomes people to come in. And an open door allows those inside to go out into the world.

In the gospel today Jesus says that "I am the gate, the door." What kind of a door was Jesus? I believe that Jesus was an open door. There are so many scriptures passages that indicate that. Jesus seemed to be open to everyone, and was criticized for that. He was open to Matthew and Zacchaeus, tax collectors and to the eyes of Jesus' contemporaries, sinners, but he dined with them. And he won them over. I think of foreigners, especially the hated Samaritans. Jesus spent time with the Samaritan woman at the well, and won her over. I think of the many women that Jesus encountered and befriended and won over, which was contrary to the custom of that time. It seems that the only ones that Jesus had difficulty with were some of the leaders of religion who liked to keep the doors closed, who were more interested in keeping people out rather than welcoming them in.

We believe that the church is the body of Christ, the living Christ in the world. Is the church like Christ, an open door? Or do we seem at times more interested in closing the doors, keeping people out rather than inviting them in. I remember John 23rd's comment made at the opening of the Second Vatican Council, when he said that we must open the windows of the church to allow in fresh air, to allow in the spirit. What followed the council was a great openness to diversity, to ecumenism, to lay ministry. Are we losing some of that? Yes, rules and regulations are necessary, but so is an open and welcoming spirit in the church. On the local level, our parish works on being welcoming. But we must continue to improve in that area.

An open door allows us to go out, and as church we are to go out and witness to the gospel and build the kingdom of God in our world.

Today we are honoring married couples who are celebrating special anniversaries this year. We have 9 couples celebrating their 25th anniversary, a couple celebrating their 40th, 17 couples celebrating their 50th, and three couples celebrating their 60th. We will recognize them and give them a special blessing at the end of mass, and congratulate them. We thank them for the example of a good marriage, and the joy and blessings that come with that.

How were they able to accomplish that? They could tell you better than I can, but I would suggest that part of the reason for their successful marriages is that they were an open door to one another. They shared not only a house, but they shared their very selves. They communicated with each other, they cared for one another, they continually welcomed one another, and that house they lived in became a true home.

And so whether we are talking about the church, our local parish, or married couples, may we be an open door to each other.