

Gates

The sign on the gate told us we were welcome to use the short cut, but be sure to shut all the gates after us. I learnt only later that there were over twenty of those gates to open and shut, and I was in the front passenger seat. About every kilometre, there was yet another gate to open and close. So much for our short cut.

What is the function of gates? They are a way of regulating the flow. When a gate is shut, it is a fence, a barrier. But when a gate is open, the barrier is removed and we can go through. On a farm, gates stop the flocks or herds from getting boxed up; they make controlled grazing possible.

We can also speak of gates in our personal relationships. I have my gates. They are my protectors. They regulate the flow of who will get close to me and who won't.

We all need our boundaries and gates; we let our friends and those we trust come in. Of course, we are all different and some people are very hesitant to open their personal gates, whereas others seem to be very free and welcoming. Whatever our personality type, we need gates to some extent; we need to protect ourselves from unwanted intrusions. Some of us might have been badly hurt and so find it particularly hard to trust other people. In this case, our gates might be very difficult to open.

In the gospel text that is read at Mass today, Jesus talks a lot about gates – or rather, he talks a lot about one particular gate. He says that *he* is the gate.

“I am the gate of the sheepfold ... Whoever enters through me will be safe and will go freely in and out and be sure of finding pasture.”

Jesus tells us that he is a safe gate. We, the flock, can go in and out in complete security, if we listen to his voice and follow him.

Jesus goes on to say that others may make similar claims, but they are false. Instead of looking after the flock, they have only their own interests at heart. History is full of these characters with their deceitful claims and members of the flock have been duped and hurt. Jesus warns us that some will come to steal and to destroy. By contrast, Jesus comes to bring life – life to the full.

I'm glad Jesus spoke about shepherds and gates. These images give us much food for thought.

I hope you find some pleasant shortcuts in life. I hope your personal gates work well – guarding you against unwelcome intrusions but also opening to welcome others when this is appropriate. I hope too that you will come to know Jesus as a life-giving gate. If you draw near to him, he will open to you the path to life everlasting.