



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

4th Sunday of Easter-Year A-May 3rd 2020

***Readings: Acts 2: 14, 36-41, Psalm 22, 1 Peter 2: 20-25,
John 10: 1-10***

Gates.

If I were to leave you with that one word today you would, I think, either be slightly puzzled or else embark on an adventure of the imagination around this simple image. But it is no accident that Christ employs this image in the midst of His glorious self- description of both His humanity and His Godhead in the much more famous picture of Himself as the Good Shepherd.

In all the 'I AM' sayings of Jesus - the ones where He deliberately takes the Divine Name, revealed to Moses at the Bush of Fire, (the great monotheistic breakthrough in the awareness of Man) - the picture of the Gate would probably be well down the popular list. But it is of no less import than those better favoured by the human memory.

Gates.

From the humble garden gate into the secret bower to the great five bar farm gate at the corner of the farmer's field, from the ancient gates of now ruined cities to the Gates of Eden where the Cherubim with flaming sword defend the integrity of Paradise from the besmirching of sinful Man, gates have meaning and purpose.

I remember, years ago, visiting the Church of St. Saviour in Chora in Constantinople, and being deeply moved by the knowledge that it was nearby, through these once upon a time city gates, that the last Christian emperor rode out to die in defence of his city against the Ottoman armies that would subsequently enslave the Balkans in the succeeding centuries. Gates admit. Gates deny access. They are a point of welcome and a point of dismissal, of closure, of exclusion, of rejection.

Gates are the place of entry of those permitted.

They are the point of denial to those hostile or ill intentioned.

Gates are guarded. In the long run of the defensive walls, the gate can be a weak point for the aggressor to attempt to storm.

Gates usher us into the paradisaal garden.

Gates ensure the wayward creature cannot wander to its own harm.

For the sheep of Christ's own flock, He is not only the Good Shepherd who leads them out into good pasture and seeks the stray and the lost. He is not only the defender of His flock against the wiles of the predatory devil, 'who prowls around, seeking whom he may devour', He is *the* GATE, the access to safety, the portal of salvation.

Those who seek access, other than by the Gate, the stormers of the walls, are hostile to the salvation of Man and enemies of God.

Just now the Church of God is much preoccupied with a profound conundrum about her very tangible gates. Quite simply, they are, by government order and command, shut. The people of God are denied access to their holy sites, entry to the Sacramental Presence, refusal of the life-giving Sacraments of Salvation. Christians are torn. They do not wish to endanger one another or anybody else for that matter. But they do not want to be treated like just another 'activity'. We want our gates to be open to all who seek the Lord. Can we not be trusted to observe the conditions of safety required – less people, more masses or even just a door count for adoration – eg only twenty people in the church at one time – distancing observed?

War, famine, plague and persecution have never stopped the Mass, never mind denied our dying the last rites of the Faith.

In penal times our forebears risked all to put the bread on the table of transformation and often paid most cruelly for it.

To keep our doors shut longer is to buy the secular lie that the command of Christ is less important than our access to Tesco's or a daily jog in the park or that somehow what we do is an optional hobby.

Catholics, all too often, fear for reasons of history, to be seen to buck the prevailing secular governance. But these are strange times. Either we think God is saying something in all this or we might as well pack up and go home. Nor need we think that, in his quiet triumph, the enemy is not forging ahead while we lie hobbled. The engines of death grind on. While thousands die of the virus, the haters of life seek more blood in their pursuit of even more radical abortion laws, smuggled in through attachment to emergency measures.

The Prime Minister returns, from his sick bed, to lead the ministerial defence. It remains to be seen whether his near encounter with death will have taught him dependence on God.

In the meantime we might recall that simple line at the beginning of Victor Hugo's great meditation on judgement and mercy, 'Les Miserables'. The bishop, who is the primary agent of mercy in the book, compares the roles of doctor and priest thus: Bishop 'Bienvenue' writes: 'The door of the doctor should never be shut.

The door of the priest should always be open'

Let us write to our MPs to let the gates of the House of God be re-opened.

Let us continue to exhort our fathers in God to stand firm against those who seek to relegate the worship of God to the realms of some dispensable and bizarre hobby.

To collaborate with this secular and reductionist view of the Faith can appear as a denial of Christ, as a demonic attempt to lock the Gates of

Eden – the gates which His glorious rising from the dead have triumphantly sprung.

2020 Fowey Retreat