

(English translation)

April 1999

Word of life

“I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture” (Jn 10:9).

Those who were listening to Jesus were familiar with the image of the gateway, from the dream of Jacob (“This is the gateway to heaven,” Gen 28:17) to God’s beloved Jerusalem with its ancient portals. (See Psalm 24:7) Psalm 118:20 reads: “This gate is the Lord’s; the just shall enter it.” Jesus makes it his own, and fills it with new meaning. He is the gate to salvation, who leads us to pastures where divine goods are freely given. He is the one and only mediator and through him men and women can go to the Father. “He is the door to the Father,” says Ignatius of Antioch, “through whom have entered Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the prophets, the apostles and the Church.” (Phila IX, 1)

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Yes, the image of the gate surely touched the hearts of the Jews; passing through the gates of the Holy City and the Temple, they had experienced a feeling of peace and unity, and the prophets had made them dream of a new Jerusalem whose doors were open to all nations.

Jesus presents himself as the one who fulfills the divine promises and the expectations of a people whose story is marked by an alliance with God that has never been revoked.

The idea of the gate is similar to and explained quite well by another image used by Jesus: “I am the way ... No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6). He is truly a passageway, an open door that leads to the Father, to God himself.

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Practically speaking, what does this Word of Life mean? Other passages of the Gospel have implications similar to this phrase from John. Let us reflect on the “narrow gate,” through which we must strive to enter (see Mt 7:13) so as to enter into life.

Why did we choose this passage? We feel that perhaps it is the closest to the truth that Jesus reveals about himself, and it helps us see best how to live it.

When did he become this wide open door, completely open to the Trinity? At the moment the door of heaven seemed to be closed for him, he became the gateway to heaven for us all.

Jesus Forsaken (see Mk 15:34 and Mt 27:46) is the door through which a perfect exchange between God and humanity takes place; in his emptying, he united the children to the Father. It is through that emptiness (the opening of the door) that we come in contact with God and God with us.

So he is at the same time a narrow and wide open door, and we ourselves can experience this.

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In his abandonment, Jesus himself became our access to the Father. His part is done. But to take advantage of such a huge grace, each one of us must do his or her tiny part, which consists of approaching that door and going through it.

How? When we suffer because of disappointment or something painful, or because of unexpected misfortune or unexplained illness, we can recall the suffering of Jesus, who experienced all these trials and a thousand others.

Yes, he is present in everything that speaks of suffering. Every suffering of ours can bear his name.

Let us try to recognize Jesus in every hardship, in all life’s difficult situations, in every moment of darkness, in our personal trials and those of others, in the sufferings of humanity. All these are him, because he has taken them upon himself.

It would be enough to tell him, with faith, “You, Lord, are my only good” (See Ps 16:2). It would be enough to do something tangible in order to alleviate “his” sufferings in the poor and those who are unhappy, in order to go beyond the door and find a joy on the other side we have never experienced before, a new fullness of life.

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