

WHEN THE DOOR IS LOCKED, WHAT ARE WE TO DO?

The parable of today's Gospel is a familiar story. Those invited to a feast are waiting. Some are better prepared than others. When those who have not prepared ask for help, those who prudently stored enough oil say there will not be enough to go around. While the unprepared run off to make up for what they did not have, the party begins. Those prepared are let in and then the doors are locked. When the other group returns, they cry out "*Open the door for us!*" What remains untold in the parable is who did the locking of the door and whether the door is locked from the inside or the outside. So often locked doors are perceived to be locked to keep people out. Sometimes doors are locked to keep people in, such as it is in prisons. In this parable, there is no mention as to which way this door was locked. Imagine if it is us who locks the door to God. Then it would be up to us to open it.

This past week has been one filled with disappointment following great joy. After my cataract-removal surgery on October 20th, my vision found a new level of sharpness. My eyes were seeing things so clearly, my heart felt like that of a young child opening up presents at Christmas. I experienced vibrant colors and pure visual depth perception. It was absolutely magical to me. Then as quick as it came, it was gone. I realized something was wrong and when I went to the eye doctor for my scheduled appointment the following week, he realized a leak was occurring. My vision was once again off and he had to schedule emergency surgery for the next day to put in more stitches to close the leak. To say my disappointment was enormous is an understatement. My frustration moved to a deeper question, was it better to have seen clearly and to have it taken away or to have never seen clearly in the first instance? What kind of gift is it if it is so transitory? After the emergency surgery, I found myself testing my eye to see if it is getting better, but there was no response like the way it had been before. Sadness filled my heart. What did I do to cope with this sadness? I threw myself a pity party and ate a hamburger, followed by a frozen pizza and after the frozen pizza, I had some hotdogs with a fried egg on top. Everything in my head refused to accept this new reality. Why was the door locked? I spent time in my Chapel, but I just could not find peace. I listened to great songs of inspiration from Christian artists and while this was momentarily comforting, the comfort was not sustainable. I was just sad and questioned my actions and what I did or could have done. Every second became a test.

From disappointment and sadness, I moved to a place of being unsettled. It felt as if I was outside the door and nothing could get me back into the place where my vision was on those incredible days when I could see and I was filled with joy. After spending some time in silence, in deep silence, I realized maybe the door is not locked from the inside. Maybe I was keeping myself out, refusing to take the new step God has for me to take. A setback is a setback. Many are suffering way more than I am. We are not defined by what we do when we walk through an open door; we are defined by how we open the door when it is closed to us. We are defined by how we unlock the hidden wisdom found in our experiences. We are defined at how we seek the key God has for us to find. At this point, God might not be locking me out; He might be inviting me to find the key to what I am to learn. The door might not be locked from the inside, but maybe it is locked from the outside. I might be doing all the closing and the locking. I might be locking myself into how I want things to be according to my selfishness and expectations. It might not be God doing the locking. To open that door for me is to let go of the perfect sight I experienced and rejoice in the ability to see what I can when I can. It is a hard lock to unlock. I had better dreams and expectations than the reality I am currently experiencing. However, it is clear to me that these are my locks and my chains, not God's. To unlock the door is to first grab the handle as hard as possible, with all of my expectations, and realize this grip won't work. Instead, unlocking this lock requires a gentleness to turn the key, a gentleness found from the conviction of surrender. That key can open this door to acceptance. Yet this inner strength can often elude us. The key and handle can only turn when we surrender. I struggle with the door, with the key, and what this experience is inviting me to do. I am not good at it. At times my fear becomes the locksmith that paralyzes me.

At the end of the parable, the outsiders ask that the door be opened for them. They say "Lord, Lord, open the door for us!" Might they be asking the wrong question? Maybe the door will be opened when they do the opening. Maybe the door will be opened when they first confront their own unpreparedness and shortsightedness of not getting the oil ahead of time. It might open when, with self-revelation, they share the times they were with the Lord and share who they are with Him. So many possibilities are presented at a locked door. In the past when I heard this parable, I always thought about what they were being locked out of, but maybe they were the ones locking themselves out. I am not perfect in acceptance of my situation and I struggle with the lock. What I do know is that God is not locking me out—He never does. I have locked myself out with my own expectations and seeing things only one way. These are my locks, not His. Just like everyone else, day by day I face a lot of possibilities. We all face a lot of unknowns.

My reflections these days remain all about the door. Am I locked out? Am I choosing to turn the lock only on my terms? The key has been given to us and our God does not lock us out. My prayers are for all of us; my hardship is nothing compared to what others are facing and suffering daily. We are defined not by how we walk through open doors but how we find the key to those that seemed locked to us. Search for the key, God will always give it to us.



Fr. John



St. Anne Parish

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