

Father O'Connor's Homily for 26 April 2026
Fourth Sunday of Easter – A

Acts of the Apostles 2: 14a, 36-41
1 Peter 2: 20b-25
John 10: 1-10

“The most important part of a church is its front door.” At least, that is what one architect said.

I would have expected him to say that the most important part is the sanctuary area here up front. But the architect said that it is the front door because that is what a visitor to the church encounters first.

A banker was writing about changes in the banking industry. Years ago, banks used to be built like fortresses – big and tall with strong doors. This conveyed the message: “Your money is safe with us, and nobody is going to get to it except you.”

Now many bank buildings look smaller, with doors made out of glass, so that you can see lots of activity going on inside. The message this conveys is: “We are really working hard to make your money work for you.”

What do you see when you come to the doors of this church? I hope that it is a message of welcome and hospitality.

A long time ago, when castles were in vogue, at the entrance there was a citizen's door and a royal door. The height of the citizen's door was a little lower than that of an average adult. This caused the citizen to enter the castle bowing humbly before the king.

We enter this church with humble reverence before Our Lord and King. How did we first become members of the Church family? It was through our Baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – by water and in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

And so as we enter the church we stop for a moment with humble reverence and take holy water from the font and make the sign of the cross. This reminds us of our Baptism, and how grateful we are to have been invited by our Good Shepherd to come through the door that leads to everlasting life.

In today's Gospel, Jesus the Good Shepherd describes Himself as being the gate, the door. Now that is a very humble expression.

How do some people present themselves? "I am the person in charge here. And I am very important."

But Jesus says of Himself, "I am the gate." What does He mean?

He is the gate to everlasting life. We can come to God the Father and we can live a fuller and more abundant life through Jesus.

Jesus says: "I am the gate for the sheep.... Whoever enters through Me will be saved.... I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly."

On Saturday, 16 May – in just three weeks – Deacon Nathan Frankart will be ordained a priest of the Diocese of Cleveland. His first priestly assignment will be at Saint Mary Parish in Hudson.

On 14 June I will celebrate the 51st anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood. Here we are, a senior priest and a brand-new priest – with our ordinations a half-century apart – but both of us sharing in the Eternal Priesthood of Jesus Christ, Our Good Shepherd, who continues to take care of His flock, with a wide-open gate.

I am convinced that the Lord is calling a number of our young people to holy orders and to the religious life. Please be like "Jesus the gate" for them – and welcome them through the door. Let them know that you think they have what it takes, if indeed the Lord is calling them to be a priest or deacon, or a religious sister or brother.

With all that is going on in our world and in the Church, would I do it all over again, if I knew then what I know now? Would I still become a priest? Absolutely! I have had headaches in the priesthood, but I have never had second thoughts. In fact, I thank the Lord every day for calling me to be His priest, and for calling me to serve here at Saint Joseph and Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parishes.

For me, I try to look at the past with gratitude and the future with hope. And I encourage you in your own vocations to do the very same thing.

And our hope is based on something that we prayed in the Responsorial Psalm today from Psalm 23: "The Lord is my Shepherd. There is nothing I shall want."

May Jesus, our Good Shepherd and our gate, keep the doors of His Church wide open in welcome to all who would like to enter. And may He keep us safe and secure as we serve Him with grateful and humble reverence.