



Through Doors Wide Open

A Pastoral Letter as we move to the end of the Year of Grace and Faith.

In these final weeks of the Year of Grace and Faith, a journey which began at Pentecost last year, I find myself thinking of doors. Older Australians sometimes speak of a time when people did not lock the doors of their homes, a time when there was more trust and less fear in society. The door was always open, and the home was a place of welcome. In the meantime, we have become a more fearful, less trusting society where doors are locked and people often live behind high walls, at least in our cities. The locked doors speak of a more fractured society, where the social bond – a bond of friendship, even family – has grown weaker.

What is true of homes is also true of churches. Once they were left open for people to pray before the Blessed Sacrament. But now our churches are usually locked, chiefly because of vandalism. People are left to pray in private space rather than the public space which speaks of the community before God, not just the individual. This is another sign of a more fearful and fractured world.

In the Gospel of John, we are told that, after the death of Jesus, the Apostles are locked in the upper room “for fear of the Jews” (20:19). But then the Risen Jesus appears to them, breathes into them the Holy Spirit, and the locked doors are blasted open, as it were, and the Apostles set forth fearlessly on the mission which will lead them to death and beyond.

We do not open the doors for ourselves. It is God in Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit: it is he who opens the doors. That is what it means to speak of grace. Our task is to walk through doors already open. But which doors? According to Scripture, God opens to us the door of *faith*, the door of the *heart* and the door of the *world*; and these are the doors through which we are called to walk. This is what the new evangelisation requires now, just as it was what the first evangelisation required when the Apostles left the upper room to walk the highways of the world to death and beyond.



Through the door of faith

In the Acts of the Apostles, Barnabas and Paul make a report when they return to Antioch, their mission-base, after the first ever Christian mission outside Palestine: They tell of “how [God] had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles” (14:27). The Gentiles had encountered not just the mission team but Christ crucified and risen, whom the mission team had proclaimed. Once they had encountered Jesus, the Gentiles decided to entrust their life to him, which is what faith means. They recognised in him the doorway into life, and they were prepared to say yes to him, to walk through that doorway.

Driving around Brisbane, I am wholly dependent on my GPS. At times, the lady in the machine tells me to do things which seem strange, but in the end I have to do what she says or end up hopelessly lost. I may not understand or like what I hear, but I have no choice. Either I follow her instructions or end up in a mess. The same is true of Jesus. What I hear from him is at times even stranger than what I hear from the GPS. But I decide to put my faith in him as the one who will lead me into eternal life. That is what it means to say that God has opened a door of faith to us. God has given us the cosmic GPS in Jesus crucified and risen. But we have to trust what we hear from him; and we have to do what he says.

Once we put our faith in Jesus, we become people who no longer just look at him. We start to see things as Jesus sees them and to respond to things as he responds to them. We start to *become* Jesus. Early in his Letter to the Galatians, Paul says that “[God] was pleased to reveal his Son *in me*” (1:16). Paul actually *becomes* the revelation of Jesus. So too in the Confessions, Augustine hears the voice of God saying, “You will be changed into me”. That is what happens when we put our faith in Jesus and walk through the door of faith that God opens for us.

It means opening our life, especially at the point of our weakness, to a power that is not our own. Then our

weakness can become strength. Paul says as much in the Second Letter to the Corinthians: "When I am weak, then I am strong" (12:10). We have no real power of our own. But if we allow the power of Christ to work in our weakness, then we become strong with the strength of the Lord crucified and risen. The Holy Spirit is breathed into the wound of our weakness, and we are made strong in ways we could have scarcely imagined. Then the doors of fear are blasted open, and we are empowered to set forth, like the Apostles, on the highways of the world.

Through the door of the heart

God may have opened a door of faith to the Gentiles, but they had to walk through that door and follow the path of life that lay beyond. To walk through the door of faith is only the beginning of a never-ending journey. That journey leads into the depths of God, into the abyss of perfect love. It is the journey of the heart. We are called to walk through the door of the heart which lies beyond the door of faith.

The journey of the heart should not be sentimentalised. In Scripture, the heart is not so much the seat of emotion as the seat of the will. To walk through the door of the heart is, therefore, to *decide* to undertake the journey that beckons once I have put my faith in Jesus. It is like Abraham who, we are told, decides to leave the world he knows as God has commanded (Gen 12:1). But then he has to decide again and again to follow the strange promptings of God as the journey unfolds. Abraham's initial yes is a beginning, not an end. Mary is the same in the Gospel of Luke: her *fiat* is a beginning, not an end (1:38). There are many other decisions which lie beyond her first word. Mary, like Abraham, must make the strange, deep and long journey of the heart. She must walk through another door on the way to eternal life.

To walk through the door of the heart requires action. This means at least the following:

- Committing to a discipline of prayer
- Coming to know and love the Scripture
- Entering more and more deeply into the sacramental life of the Church, especially the Eucharist
- Loving and serving the poor
- Joyfully disciplining the flesh.

This is the "narrow door" (Luke 13:24) because it is seriously counter-cultural. Yet the fact that it is narrow does not mean that it is not the door to eternal life.

In the Prologue of his Rule, St Benedict urges us "to run with hearts wide open". The heart wide open is the heart that makes a decision without hesitation or qualification. It is the kind of decision we hear when Mary speaks her *fiat* to the angel Gabriel. It is a yes with no strings attached. To speak a word like Mary's is what it means to walk, even run through the door of the heart.

Through the door of the world

Once we have walked through the door of faith and the door of the heart, the door of the world beckons; or rather, Christ beckons us to walk through the door of the world as he himself has:
"Go out to all the world and tell the Good News".

These days we cannot sit back and wait for others to walk through the door of the Church. One fact is that many Catholic people have

never really walked through the door of the Church; they are baptised pagans. Another fact is that many Catholics no longer walk through the door of the Church; they have chosen other doors, not all of which lead to life, let alone eternal life. We could just sit back and lament such facts, refusing to walk through the door of the world and preferring to stay in some self-protective, inward-looking Church that would not be the Church at all, or at least not the Church of Jesus. His Church is a Church which not only *has* a mission but which *is* a mission. Mission is why he has called the Church into being and why he sustains the Church his Body from moment to moment.

The question therefore is this: If they – the many Catholics who have never come or those who have gone elsewhere, as well as the many who have had no contact of any kind with the Church – if they will not come to us, then how might we go to them? They have a right to hear the Good News of Jesus, which means that we have a duty to offer it to them. But how might that happen? The question is a challenge to our imagination and our courage. It challenges us to a kind of Copernican revolution which allows us to see that, just as the sun does not revolve around the earth, so too the world does not revolve around the Church. If the world will not come to the Church, then the Church must go to the world.

In these last weeks of the Year of Grace and Faith, I will be moving around the Archdiocese speaking of the call to a new evangelisation, a new outreach, a new surge of Gospel energy. People from Faith and Life will accompany me, and they will be responsible for the follow-up I am keen to see happen. I urge all of you to join me in this process, which will bring to an end the journey of grace and faith we began last year and mark the start of another journey on to the highways of the world, the journey called mission.

Through the final door

In the end, the door of faith, the door of the heart and the door of the world look to another door, the final entrance to eternal life. This is the door of heaven. The first three doors lead to this last one, which is the doorway home to Paradise, from which we exile ourselves because of sin and to which we must return by way of grace.

One of the splendid titles given to the Mother of Christ is *porta caeli*, the door of heaven. Mary, Our Lady of Grace and Woman of Faith, has accompanied us on our journey through this Year of Grace and Faith, and as the journey comes to an end, we look to her as "the Star of Evangelisation". Mary it is who gives Jesus to the world, but she is also the one who leads the world to Jesus. Through the Virgin Mother, the light rose over the earth, and through her the earth comes to the light of the Lamb who shines for ever in the heavenly city, which needs no sun because the Lamb is its light (Rev 21:23). Through the woman who is *porta caeli*, we return to the Garden. When Jesus rises from the dead, he is the first one home to Paradise; Mary is the second when she is assumed body and soul into heaven, sharing fully in her Son's Resurrection. Where they have gone, we are called to follow; and our task is to bring many others with us. We journey together or we do not journey at all; for the road is too risky for those who travel alone. But for those who travel together in love, led by Jesus and Mary, the road is the arduous and joyful path home to eternal life.

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