

Orthodox

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)

April 26, 2026

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One of the major concerns of the Church throughout the centuries has been to pass on proper teaching, doctrine, and dogma. This is called orthodoxy, which means right belief. The opposite of orthodoxy is heresy. Heresy means choice because it is the choice to disregard proper teaching and split from the Church like a sheep that has gone astray. Much of Christian tradition is strongly tied to the interplay between orthodoxy and heresy.

Cardinal Timothy Radcliffe, in his 2023 retreat talk to the participants of the Synod on Synodality, picked up on this interplay, but made an important observation. He said, "orthodoxy is spacious and heresy is narrow." This is much different than how we usually think about it. Immediately following his comment, Cardinal Radcliffe gave his reasoning. He said, "the Lord leads his sheep out of the small enclosure of the sheep fold into the wide-open pastures of our faith." (32) This is our Gospel reading for this 4th Sunday of Easter.

In today's Gospel, Jesus says, "I am the gate." As the gate, this certainly means he is the way into the enclosure. If we listen closer to the Gospel passage, however, the gate is also the way out of the

enclosure. The passage says that the shepherd calls his sheep by name and leads them out. It also says, "whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture."

Returning to the observation of Cardinal Radcliffe that orthodoxy is spacious and heresy narrow, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines heresy as the obstinate denial or doubt of the truth of the divine Catholic faith. For me, the word obstinate in the definition is insightful. Those who are obstinate are unwilling to change or move. Those who are obstinate do not want anyone to challenge them. Those who are obstinate want to be locked up like sheep in the security of the enclosure. To be clear, the enclosure is not bad. It is a place of safety and protection. For those who are afraid of leaving the enclosure, however, we only have to remember the words of Psalm 23, which says, "even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side. With your rod and your staff that give me courage." Christ, the gate and Good Shepherd, certainly wants to protect us, but also wants us to have courage to go out and experience the verdant pastures.

Christ is the gate that widens our spaces.

In what ways has the Church tried to take the place of Christ as the gatekeeper, deciding who to let in and who to let out? When have I been too obstinate in what I wanted or thought, therefore maybe falling into heresy?

As we continue with this mass, let us pray for a Church that is spacious and orthodox. May we set aside our own heretical ways that lead to narrow-mindedness and division. Instead, may Christ the gate, open our minds as we seek to follow the shepherd, who said, 'I came so that they might have life, and have it more abundantly.'