
A THEOLOGY OF A HOLY DOOR

A holy door or porta sancta has been used since the fifteenth century as a ritual expression of conversion. Pilgrims and penitents pass through it as a gesture of leaving the past behind and crossing the threshold from sin to grace, from slavery to freedom, and from darkness to light. Often these rituals are associated with prayer, pilgrimage, sacrifice, confession, and indulgences.

But the door finds meaning only when the believer associates the door with Christ. **Jesus is the Door!** In the words of Pope Francis, “There is only one way that opens wide the entrance into the life of communion with God: this is Jesus, the one and absolute way to salvation. To him alone can the words of the Psalmist be applied in full truth: ‘This is the door of the Lord where the just may enter’ (Ps 118:20).”

Saint John Paul II offers a similar exhortation: “To focus on the door is to recall the responsibility of every believer to cross its threshold. To pass through that door means to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord; it is to strengthen faith in him in order to live the new life which he has given us. It is a decision which presumes freedom to choose and also the courage to leave something behind, in the knowledge that what is gained is divine life [cf. Mt 13:44-46]” (Saint John Paul II, *Incarnationis Mysterium*, 8, in the year 2000).

John’s gospel clearly depicts this relationship between Jesus and us. “Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life, and have it more abundantly” (John 10:7-10).

It is fitting that a Holy Door be situated within a church building. The door of the Church is the *ianua ecclesia* – “the silent witness to all the moments of our lives” (USCCB, *About the Jubilee Door*, 1999). Often sacramental rituals begin at the door – here, the priest or deacon welcomes the parents as they bring their child for baptism; here, he greets the bride and groom as they begin the wedding liturgy; here, he greets the catechumens at the Rite of Acceptance; and, finally, the priest greets the casket at the beginning of the funeral liturgy.

In this Jubilee Year, let us allow God to surprise us. He never tires of casting open the doors of his heart and of repeating that he loves us and wants to share his love with us. The Church feels the urgent need to proclaim God’s mercy. Her life is authentic and credible only when she becomes a convincing herald of mercy... Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus, The Face of Mercy*, 25