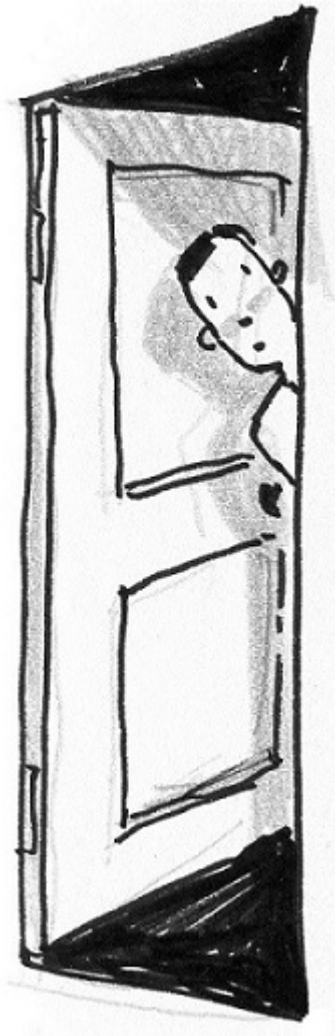


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by Pat Marrin

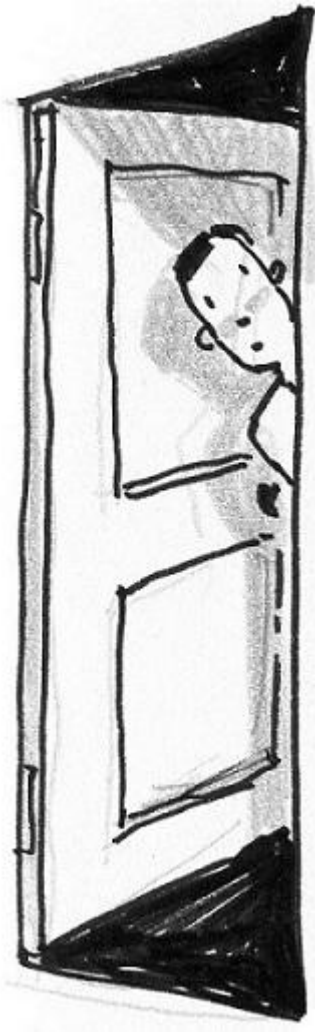
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“Strive to enter through the narrow gate” (Luke 13:22).

Rom 8:26-30; Luke 13:22-30

The root of the word to decide is literally “to cut off,” describing the need to narrow an issue to its essence. Ambiguity ends; we can’t have it both ways. The decision to marry someone involves setting aside all others to focus on this one person. The image has a surgical sense to it, acknowledging the finality of a decision to let go of everything except the one thing you really want. Without this intent, a decision is incomplete, a door left ajar instead of closed.

In the film, “A Man for All Seasons,” Sir Thomas More, chancellor under King Henry VIII, is imprisoned for refusing to sign an oath affirming the king’s right to divorce and remarry to secure a male heir. Before his trial and execution, More’s daughter tries to convince him to sign the oath but with a mental reservation. He cups his hands to show that holding water would fail if one finger were relaxed. His integrity

requires a total, decisive intent.

As Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem and the fate he knew awaited him there, he invited allegiance from his disciples, knowing they would falter. Because he was controversial, people withheld commitment. He used the image of a narrow gate to describe the decisive passage they would need to make to follow him through crisis to resolution.

Luke reminded his community that this is the cost of discipleship.. Church members could argue that they had attended services and been taught the faith, but their Christian identity was still only on the surface. They were Sunday Christians who disappeared on Monday into the dominant culture, untested and unavailable to practice their faith.

Present-day Christians face not so much a conscious refusal to commit to faith as a lack of focus. St. Paul captured this perfectly in today's first reading. Believers wanted to pray but didn't know how. We want to pray but are often lost in a culture filled with media noise, sensory over-stimulation, shallow desires and constant anxiety. Paul assures us that just the desire to pray is a sign that the Spirit is praying within us and for us. The Spirit knows our hearts and intercedes for us according to God's will. Those who spend time each day with the Word will always benefit from listening to the living voice of Jesus in the Gospels. Even carrying a phrase from the Scriptures into our day can be a lifeline that sustains us in conversation with God. This intimacy is itself the essence and goal of all prayer.

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