

4th Sunday of Easter A

First Reading Acts 2:14.36-41

On the day of Pentecost Peter stood up with the Eleven and addressed the crowd with a loud voice: "The whole House of Israel can be certain that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ." Hearing this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the apostles, "What must we do, brothers?" "You must repent," Peter answered, "and every one of you must be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise that was made is for you and your children, and for all those who are far away, for all those whom the Lord our God will call to himself." He spoke to them for a long time using many arguments, and he urged them, "Save yourselves from this perverse generation."

They were convinced by his arguments, and they accepted what he said and were baptised.

That very day about three thousand were added to their number.

Second Reading 1 Peter 2:20-25

The merit, in the sight of God, is in bearing punishment patiently when you are punished after doing our duty. This, in fact, is what you were called to do, because Christ suffered for you and left an example for you to follow the way he took. He had not done anything wrong, and there had been no perjury in his mouth. He was insulted and did not retaliate with insults; when he was tortured he made no threats but he put his trust in the righteous judge. He was bearing our faults in his own body on the cross, so that we might die to our faults and live for holiness; through his wounds you have been healed. You had gone astray like sheep but now you have come back to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

Gospel John 10:1-10

Jesus said to the Jews: "I tell you most solemnly, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold through the gate, but gets in some other way is a thief and a brigand. The one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the flock; the gate-keeper lets him in, the sheep hear his voice, one by one he calls his own sheep and leads them out. When he has brought out his flock, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow because they know his voice. They never follow a stranger but run away from him; they do not recognise the voice of strangers." Jesus told them this parable but they failed to understand what he meant by telling it to them. So Jesus spoke to them again: "I tell you most solemnly, I am the gate of the sheepfold. All others who have come are thieves and brigands; but the sheep took no notice of them. I am the gate. Anyone who enters through me will be safe: he will go freely in and out and be sure of finding pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full."

Meditation

The image of the good shepherd has nothing to do with saccharine sentimentality. Shepherds were important figures in the Palestinian landscape. They bore total responsibility for the flocks on which their people depended. They saw to it that the sheep found adequate grazing and water in a land that could be harsh and forbidding. They kept the animals safe from wild predators and human marauders, sometimes at the cost of their own lives. If the shepherds were unfaithful, the sheep could not long survive. It is no wonder that the people of the Old Testament cast God himself in the image of the good shepherd, sustainer and protector of the flock of Israel. The Church found the perfect fulfilment of this image in the risen Christ, who had laid down his own life to become the very source of life for his people. He nourishes his flock with the word and the bread of life.

In the mixed metaphors of today's gospel, he is the gate through which they pass to the safety of the sheepfold and the shepherd who defends them from all threats of evil. In the First Letter of Peter, Christ the shepherd is called the "Guardian of your souls." The Greek word used is episkopos, more commonly translated "bishop". Although Christ is no longer visibly present to us as he was to his first hearers, he continues to nourish and to preserve his people through the Church's ministers. On Good Shepherd Sunday, then, we give thanks for the gift of all the good and faithful shepherds who lay down their lives in daily service to the Lord's flock.