

Reflections on the Readings for the 4th Sunday of Easter A

John 10: 1-10

Today is traditionally known as “Good Shepherd Sunday” (although the title “the Good Shepherd” only comes in the verse immediately after the text of today’s Gospel Reading). Amongst other themes it is also known as “Vocations Sunday”. As always, when Jesus gives a parable or performs a miracle in this Gospel he is misunderstood and has to offer an explanation in the form of a long discourse. Today we are given the parable and the opening lines of the discourse, which can be confusing with talk of sheep, gates, sheepfolds, gatekeepers, a shepherd and people going in and out. Perhaps the best way to understand what Jesus is driving at, not only in this parable but in **ALL** his actions in this Gospel, is to focus on the final verse of today’s extract, “I came that they may live and have it abundantly.” (Jn.10:10) This is actually the middle verse of St John’s Gospel, its heart, if you like. It acts as a kind of pivot around which the whole of this Gospel develops. “Life”, “abundance of life” is what Jesus offers throughout his ministry, in both his words and actions.

Acts 2: 14, 26-41

Last week we were given the first part of St Peter’s address to the crowd on the Day of Pentecost. Today we are offered the second, and final, part. As a result of all that he has told them about Jesus, the response of the crowd is very simple, “What must we do?”. The answer is the same one that Jesus gave in his own ministry, “Repent”. This, through the action of baptism, will result in their forgiveness. This heady conclusion – 3,000 baptisms on the Day of Pentecost alone – marks the successful beginning of the mission of the New Church: the same mission which is ours today.

1 Peter 2: 20-25

Today’s extract is used as a canticle at Evening Prayer on Sunday’s during the Season of Lent, and it is easy to see why. Facing persecution for their faith, as the recipients of this letter most certainly were, they are encouraged to imitate Christ in the way they respond to their fate. He was the original “lamb led to the slaughter”, and building on that imagery they are told, “For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” This is, of course, the same image used by St John in today’s Gospel.

Prayer

Lord, Shepherd of your sheep, guard us as we live amid the dangers and temptations of this life. Help us to be aware of your loving and always forgiving presence. Amen.