

Fourth Sunday of Easter
† Sunday, 3 May 2020



Cycle of Prayer: New Members of the Church
Keynote: The Lord is risen! We rejoice and are glad!

Acts of the Apostles 2: 14, 36-41

The apostle Peter boldly proclaims his faith before the gathered crowd. No longer the frightened man who thrice denied the Master. *'(You) can be certain that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ'* Simon Peter tells them. When asked what they must do, Peter says, *'You must repent, and everyone 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.'* It seems Peter spoke for a long time, urging his listeners using many arguments. Many were convinced, *'and they accepted what he said and were baptised that very day about three thousand were added to their number.'*

Responsorial Psalm 22 (23) – A psalm of confidence and happiness – Alleluia!

First Letter of Peter 2: 20-25

This passage makes reference to the book of the prophet Isaiah. Many scholars also see traces of a primitive Christian hymn that portrays Jesus as the Suffering Servant a theme found in the Old Testament prophet. *'The merit, in the sight of God, is in bearing punishment patiently... this is what you are called to do,'* writes Peter *'because Christ suffered for you and left an example for you to follow.'* The apostle contrasts the Suffering Servant – an image familiar to his listeners – with what happened to the innocent Jesus – falsely accused, yet silent, insulted and tortured but patient in adversity. Jesus, Peter says, *'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.'* Then the reading prepares us for the gospel of the day, for Peter writes *'You had gone astray like sheep but now you have come back to the shepherd.'*

Gospel according to John 10: 1-10

We may be familiar with the Good Shepherd story, but when Jesus first told it, the meaning was a riddle, and the disciples, *'failed to understand what he meant by telling it to them!'* So the evangelist John tells us that Jesus spoke to them again. It may help us to deepen our understanding to realise that in the Old Testament the Lord God is frequently portrayed as the 'shepherd of the people'. Jesus contrasts himself with the teachers who came before him. They are likened to thieves and brigands ignored by the people.

Now Jesus says, *'I am the gate of the sheepfold... anyone who enters through me will be safe: he will go freely in and out and be sure of finding pasture.'* In a world where country folk were well used to herding their sheep and goats, and tending and caring for the flock, and protecting them from thieves and attacks by wild animals, everyone would have known how to call their own flock from the common sheepfold, and would know that the sheep were ready to follow their own master recognising the voice calling them. So Jesus says, *'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.'* It seems that shepherds used to lead and the sheep followed, rather than our custom, of driving the sheep ahead of the shepherd using a sheepdog.

What I like about this parable is the idea that Jesus calls each one of us by name, one by one. He knows us individually by name. But also like the sheep in the parable we respond individually and each follow the master when he calls. Jesus concludes, *'I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full.'*