

Cycle A Fourth Sunday of Easter

Reading 1, Acts 2:14a, 36-41

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed: "Let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, "What are we to do, my brothers?" Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is made to you and to your children and to all those far off, whomever the Lord our God will call." He testified with many other arguments, and was exhorting them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand persons were added that day.

Responsorial Psalm ,Ps 23: 1-3a, 3b4, 5, 6

R. (1) The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose; beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

He guides me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side. With your rod and your staff that give me courage.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for years to come.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Reading 2, 1 Pt 2:20b-25

Beloved: If you are patient when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps. *He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.* When he was insulted, he returned no insult; when he suffered, he did not threaten; instead, he handed himself over to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you had gone astray like sheep, but you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

Gospel, Jn 10:1-10

Jesus said: "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber. But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice, as the shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice. But they will not follow a stranger; they will run away from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers." Although Jesus used this figure of speech, the Pharisees did not realize what he was trying to tell them. So Jesus said again, "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."

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, "What are we to do, my brothers?"

Today is traditionally known as Good Shepherd Sunday because of today's gospel from the 10th chapter of John. The image of the shepherd and his sheep is a very old one. We have seen the popular image of Jesus the Good Shepherd holding a lamb over his shoulders. Or the smiling Jesus sitting under a tree, with a little lamb on his lap. These images of the shepherd no doubt appealed to us from a young age because of the tenderness of Jesus, his care for the sheep and his compassion. How reassuring it is that Jesus is always there to support us on our journey through life. When we face difficult problems, or crosses come our way, or some personal disaster occur, the presence of Jesus the Good Shepherd reassures us that we are not abandoned, that Jesus loves us and supports us.

All that sounds so comforting and wonderful; He calls, He leads, and we follow. But, what is a good life led by Jesus? *"What are we to do, my brothers"* in this world of ours? A world of total violence, where so many are suffering and dying. First, we should recognize that our faith in Jesus the Good Shepherd is not the same today as it was when we were children. We need to go to the margins, and encounter the vulnerable and needy to understand what Jesus loving us truly means. Maybe we should ask what prevents us from a good life? Definitely our egos, our pride, greed, and anger, and our violence or how we help destroy the environment. But the flip side can also be a problem...we sometimes have a problem of just being nice. It's easy to be nice... history is filled with nice people looking the other way...in the ancient Roman Empire... in the Jim Crow South... in Nazi Germany...or today, in a world filled with violence. You see unfortunately, sometimes we are bystanders walking by the cross, minding our own business, not allowing ourselves to close enough to be *"cut to the heart."* But as we heard in the 2nd reading: *"For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps"* So we need to open ourselves to be *"cut to the heart"*...to be moved to act as Jesus did, non-violently to relieve suffering, to oppose injustice and violence. It's not okay to say, I'm going to be a nice person, and lead a good life just being good. That is not good enough. A good life is not an easy life. It's not about being comfortable,

it's not about making money or being successful. So, how do we live a good life in a world with wars raging in 32 nations, 13,000 nuclear weapons, and billions of people dealing with subhuman poverty, and with the repercussions of racism, gun violence, hunger, catastrophic climate change? I could go on and on. Well, living a good life is as simple...and as difficult...as loving one other...as actively working every day of our lives to love others...taking it to heart to make the world better for others, especially those at the margins...those in need.

Today's scriptures tell us who Jesus is, but they also tell us who we are all called to be. That's why the readings today are intimately linked to another name we have for this Sunday. 60 years ago Pope Paul VI launched this 4th Sunday of Easter as Vocations Sunday, a day on which we pray for vocations of all people of God. Everyone should know that God loves us, that He is calling us and that He has a plan for each of us.

I have to tell you a brief story that happened to friends of mine when they were “*cut to the heart.*” My friend received a call early one morning from his friend in Denver. A woman was flying to Atlanta that day who needed some help. Anna made the hazardous journey to Arizona from Guatemala with her two children and was seeking asylum. Gangs had taken her house, and threatened to abuse and kill her children. She was being allowed to reunite with her husband who she hadn't seen in 12 years...he was here working and sending money to his family for them to survive. Without hesitation my friend jumped into action; he located an interpreter and they took 3 ½ hours to locate her at the airport...she hadn't eaten for 2 days...Anna's husband was in Toccoa, GA, and her two kids somehow had already arrived there, so they took her there. It was an exhausting day for my friend...he said imagine how exhausted Anna and her family were after months of daily stress getting here. When he got home, my friend's wife apologized saying this was all her fault. She admitted to praying in bed that morning that she wanted to do something about the suffering immigrants at our borders. My friend said God missed zapping her that day and chose him to do His work. 😊 I'm pleased to report that after 5 years, Anna, her husband and children are documented and thriving as a family in Charleston.

We know there is a shortage of priests and religious, but, it is not only for them that we pray on this Vocations Sunday. We pray for all of us because we all are people who lead others to

experience God's love. We must expand the term vocation to include all of us. As the 1st reading said, *"you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is made to you and to your children and to all those far off, whomever the Lord our God will call."* In fact, every one of us probably has multiple vocations, as we are being called by God to be spouses, parents, caregivers...to be teachers, plumbers, civil servants...you name it. These are callings which not only demand fidelity to Jesus the Good Shepherd, but also demand that we embrace our vocations. God is calling every single one of us to work for the Gospel with great love every single day. When we are *"cut to the heart"*, there's no doubt that Jesus is calling and we are following. When we pray about it, God will tell us what He wants us to do. Come Holy Spirit.

So what's holding us back, what are we afraid of? Do you know what Jesus said? Go and read about Jesus, and what's the one thing he repeatedly said to His disciples? Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid, because His disciples were terrified. All of us need a teacher to say, you don't have to be afraid. Jesus never said *"life will be easy"*...He said, *"I will be with you always. I love you. Do not be afraid."*

Did you ever hear the legend of the rich man who visited a great cathedral while it was being built? He saw a workman carving a tiny bird on the inside of a beam. He was puzzled and asked the man, "Why are you spending so much time carving that bird into a beam that will be covered by the roof? No one will ever see it." And the workman replied, "Because God will see it."

As each of us are carving tiny birds of love into the "great cathedrals" that we are building in our lives...we will not be seen if we are doing it right. One day, however, it is very possible that the world may marvel at what we have created here at St. Andrew... may they see a caring and inclusive community who changed the world for the better. And, it will be in the great love that has been added to the world by the un-noticed work we do and sacrifices each of us made to make the world better for others...that is what Jesus Himself will see. He called, He leads and we follow. Do not be afraid to be *"cut to the heart."* When we pray about it, God will tell us what He wants us to do. Come Holy Spirit. Amen! Alleluia!