

EASTER 4
Acts 2:14;36-41
1 Peter 2: 20-25
Jn 10:1-10

On the day of Pentecost, having been filled with the Holy Spirit, St Peter preached the good news of Jesus and the Resurrection to the crowds on the streets of Jerusalem. Despite having never attended an Evangelism Workshop, or taking a course in Making Disciples, some 3000 people responded to his message about Jesus and the Resurrection, by asking what they should do to be saved. Peter told them what John the Baptist told his people, namely, to repent and be baptised. He told them to change direction in their lives and move from being entirely self-focussed as though they were a god and be open to be guided by the God who raised Jesus from the dead.

Instead of regarding themselves as self-sufficient relying entirely on their own resources and human strength, Peter's message urged them to live in a constant movement between heaven and earth. They were to be commuters, carrying their earthly selves and lives to God so that he might penetrate and transform them so that they can bring them back into the world in order to claim it for God and his kingdom.

The front door of our homes has two sides – an inner and outer side. The inner side defines the boundary of our home, our space where we can relax, feel safe and rest. The outer side defines the border between our home and the wider world, and to move from one realm to the other we have to pass through the open door.

St John's gospel tells us that Jesus is that one that comes from heaven to earth so bringing heaven to earth, and then he will return taking earth to heaven. He described himself as the door of the sheepfold through which God's flock must pass to find salvation, safety, health, wholeness and God's peace within their hearts. Once rested, they will listen for Jesus' call, recognise his voice and follow him into the world as his witnesses.

Jesus was accused by the Jewish religious leaders of sheep stealing, and in return he accused them of being self-focussed false shepherds who led God's flock astray from the true path.

In the early days following the resurrection, the dying and rising of Jesus was not only the message, it defined the messenger. The apostles and those who succeeded them did not think of themselves as being a kind of sales team selling a product. Neither did they see the Church as an organisation that they were trying to run in line with best management practice. The message and the messenger were two sides of the same coin. The Catholic Church (as it became), was the embodiment of the gospel and the gospel was at the same time the proclamation of the dying and rising of Jesus. The Church and the messengers were one. They were the visible presence of Jesus. Jesus was truly present in the Church and in the lives of its members who lived in the world.

The Church is not an end in itself, it has been called to be the living witness of the resurrection of the one who is the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls and the door through whom we must pass to receive salvation. The Church needs dedicated and fearless disciples in every age, and particularly in our time when the Church is faced with the temptation to turn itself into an institution rather than a living message. In the service for the consecration of a bishop in The 1662 Anglican Book of Common Prayer we find these words addressed to the new bishop. "Be to the flock of Christ a shepherd, not a wolf; feed them, devour them not. Hold up the weak, heal the sick, build up the broken, bring again the outcasts, seek the lost."

All Christian leaders and disciples, whether ordained or lay, are called to be true shepherds. When people look up to them they expect to be fed with the Faith, not be fed up with falsehood. Leadership is risky, costly and dangerous and in the image of Christ, true leaders bring wholeness to others out of their wounds rather than their strengths.

On this Good Shepherd Sunday, pray that the Church may fearlessly preach of gospel of Jesus Christ and that the message and the messengers are one.

Msgr Harry Entwistle
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