

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter (Good Shepherd Sunday)

Acts 2:14, 36-41

1 Peter 2:20-25

John 10:1-10

Filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday, Peter preached the good news of Jesus' Resurrection to the crowds in Jerusalem. He had never been to a workshop on evangelism, nor had he watched a YouTube video about 'How to make Disciples', yet some 3000 people responded to his challenge by asking what they should do to be saved. Peter's answer was the same as John the Baptist and Jesus', namely "Repent and be baptised," that is, change the direction of your life from being self-focussed to being God focussed and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Peter urged them to rely on God, not on themselves, and be commuters between heaven and earth, taking their earthly life to God and asking Him to transform them through His love so they can grow His Kingdom on earth. So who or what makes this type of commuting possible?

The front door of our home has two faces. The inner face defines the boundary of our home where we can relax, be refreshed and secure. It is also the place we can escape and hide from the world because the outer face of the door is the boundary between our 'space' and the world. To move from our home into the world means we must pass through the door.

Jesus came from heaven to earth and returned to heaven. We are from the earth and are journeying to heaven. Jesus is our door between this earthy life and heavenly life. He described Himself as the door of the sheepfold through which we His disciples must open to find wholeness and God's peace in our hearts. Once refreshed we must listen for Jesus' call, recognise His voice, and go into the world as His witnesses and agents.

When crowds gathered around Jesus, the Jewish leaders accused Him of sheep stealing, while He accused them of being false shepherds who were so self-focussed they were leading God's people away from the path of His truth. In the period following Jesus' Resurrection, the dying and rising of Jesus was not only the apostle's message, it also defined the messenger. The Apostles did not see themselves as selling salvation as a product or creating a corporation with a 5-year plan and the best management practice. The Church's message of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus was visible in the lives of those who preached that message. They were the presence of the risen Christ in the world. The Church is the Body of Christ, not an International Corporate body.

Neither is the Church an end in itself. It has been gathered, like the Children of Israel, to be a living witness of God through the one who is the shepherd and guardian of the souls of the faithful. He is the door through which we will eventually enter the Heavenly Banquet.

In every age the Church has needed dedicated, faithful and fearless disciples and servant leaders. Our age is no different. Once again, governments no longer take a neutral stance in their dealings with Christianity, they are actively trying to limit or even destroy it. In

countries like ours, they don't openly persecute the Church, they try to neutralise and eventually kill it through legislation.

We need faithful, strong laity and clergy who will stand firm and suffer whatever it takes to proclaim God's truth. The Anglican 1662 Prayer Book has these words to say to a newly consecrated bishop, which applies to all disciples, "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."

God's faithful people expect to look up to their lay and clergy leaders to be fed, not to look up and become fed up. Servant leadership is risky, costly and dangerous. Yet in the image of Christ the servant and wounded healer, lay and clergy leaders must bring wholeness to God's people, more out of their woundedness than their strengths.

On this Good Shepherd Sunday when we think of Jesus who knows, and is known by His sheep, pray that our lay and ordained leaders in the Church, especially in our Ordinariate and within our own parish community, may be faithful and courageous shepherds.

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