

OUR LADY, STAR OF THE SEA, WEYMOUTH

HOMILY FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN EASTERTIDE (YEAR B)

22nd April 2018

Acts 4.8-12; Psalm 117; 1 John 3.1-2; John 10.11-18

Who here has repented during this week, either formally or informally?

Two weeks ago, Father Stephen reminded us of the unconditional love and strength we receive through forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation. This is so valuable, especially when we know we have done something significant we need to say sorry for. Also, in our Confiteor at the start of Mass we are putting ourselves into the right frame of mind to be here and worship and receive Jesus. That is, IF we are paying attention and meaning what we say. "I confess to Almighty God and to you my brothers and sisters...." Have a little look around you, and recognise you are "confessing" to each other as well as God. If necessary, do your best to say sorry directly to someone either now before we start, or after Mass before that person leaves. If you can't do this for whatever reason, at least be honest to yourself so that when we pray the Confiteor, we mean it. Thank you.

So, good morning this Good Shepherd Sunday, which I hope you recognised as being named after today's Gospel. You see, quite simply, Jesus is the good shepherd. We all come from different backgrounds and experiences in life; and these shape how we may understand that phrase. We may know the truth of much of what I shall say in our heads, but perhaps we don't feel it. If that resonates with you, as St Paul says in Romans 5.4, persevere; because trials bring perseverance, perseverance brings character, character hope, and that hope won't fail. Hang on to the truth and Jesus will meet and lead you as the Good Shepherd.

You see he's the one who frees his people from the bondage of sin (remember our Confiteor?) and gathers them into one flock, the Church – which means all the believers/followers of Christ. He does this under the New Covenant, the Covenant made in his blood. It is important to realise that a shepherd back then had a dangerous job, he really was at risk from wild animals, and as highlighted, a hired hand wouldn't die for the sheep, but the shepherd who loves them, he does. How blessed we are when we come to Mass. Not only do we recall the Covenant in Jesus blood, we also get a chance to set ourselves right with God, we praise him, we hear God's word, you get a homily (and I am given the wonderful gift of preparing it) and we get to re live what Jesus did and does for us. We re-live how he gave his life, freely.....for you and me. (How's that for a 30 second recap of the Mass?!)

And from today's Gospel note how Jesus says "my flock includes other sheep that are not of this fold", he was pointing out that he had come to lead much more than just the dispersed children of Israel, and by analogy today he's come to lead much more than just us. Don't be or become complacent. Jesus gives his Church – you and I and every baptised Christian – the mission of shepherding all people to his Father. Yes, he is THE Good Shepherd, who is calling everyone to him; and he calls us to do this for him.

More of the Good Shepherd at the end, but for a moment let's recall our first reading. You know, I love the 3-year cycle of readings we have at Mass; however, we sometimes need a bit of filling in of the gaps; unless we have pre-read the readings we may need help with the context. So, here's what has been going on. (In chapter 3) Peter and John have just healed the cripple at the beautiful gate. (N.B. we also are cripples needing healing, since we are crippled spiritually to the degree our sins affect us). We probably are familiar with the phrase "I have neither silver nor gold..... get up and walk". Everyone is amazed.

Everyone stares at them and Peter says "Why do you stare? It's not us, it's Jesus who heals. The same Jesus you killed!" (Oh Oh) "But I know you didn't know what you were doing "

Isn't that a stunning show of the depth of God's and Peter's love; and maybe those hearing this thought, oh, that's nice – "So repent!" Yes, Peter acknowledges their ignorance, but he still insists they admit their guilt and turn to God. (referring back to the Confiteor and us today, we recognise that part of their guilt is not acknowledging that Jesus is THE Christ)

Unsurprisingly the priests and Temple guards get upset, so they come and arrest the disciples because they were preaching the truth that resurrection from the dead has been proved in Jesus, that the name of Jesus has power to heal, and therefore they need to re-think what they believe and repent.

This leads on to today's section from the book of Acts (4.8-12). Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, speaks. (By the way, we also have been filled with the Holy Spirit) What does he say?

- 1 They are being questioned for doing a good deed, for healing someone!
- 2 Peter is glad to tell them how, i.e. in the name of Jesus, and remind them what they did, "whom you crucified" and
- 3 It is Jesus who is the cornerstone. His name among the whole world is the name by which we are saved. This is dangerous talk for them.

Now we really need to read on beyond today's section. The priests and Sadducees are astonished at Peter's boldness. They only didn't punish the disciples there and then because they were scared of how the people would react. The miracle was so clear and definite that they themselves realised it had happened, and yet still couldn't bring themselves to acknowledge the truth. We might criticise them for being blind, let's have some sympathy and first consider how difficult it must have been for them to change strongly ingrained ways of thinking; I dare say we can also suffer from this type of blindness.

Anyway, the disciples were instructed, actually threatened, not to preach.

(Can you see the parallels today? Christians in many foreign countries, more and more Christians who value life are being prevailed on to shut up. In recent days, Ealing Council has banned "Life" groups from praying outside the Marie Stopes Abortion Centre there; A University banned the Catholic Society from setting up a stall!)

So, do the disciples stop? No! They gather together, praise God, pray, ask for courage and continue. (NB praising together has un-recognised power). They continue to preach and heal. Then (in Acts 5.17) the priests become even more jealous (a very dangerous emotion), they arrest the disciples and flog them (these whips had sheep's teeth on the cords and easily lacerated the skin).

So, what does all I've been saying mean to me and you. Like Jesus, these disciples weren't hired workers. They knew the truth of the resurrection and power of the name of Jesus.

It's also very, very clear that we are not hired workers. John states we are God's children and he has lavished his love on us. We have the same truth, and power.

Therefore, we must behave like children of God, not like hired workers. We must imitate those early disciples. Let's try to make our lives shine so brightly that even when we get things wrong others are attracted.

Let's praise God, let's pray for courage. Let's prepare ourselves so that we can speak out against injustice etc., but moreover speak out that the reason we care the reason we love, is because we are God's children. And we need to say this even when those we speak to don't acknowledge it. So many people (us included) do things wrong.... if the opportunity arises then like Jesus and Peter we can say "I know you didn't know what you were doing". Then we can follow this up in some simple way of telling them the truth about Jesus, many, many people don't know even the basics of who He is.

If that feels too difficult for you, perhaps just let people know you go to Mass, invite them to one of the many events that happen here. We are Church, Jesus the Good Shepherd is the cornerstone we are built upon and he will give each of us the particular resources we need for the particular role he gives us. He has commissioned us as, we have a purpose, we have the mission that God himself gave.

Do you remember what it was like to invite or be invited to a party, or indeed how awful it was when all your friends were invited and you weren't? I remember, and I am so glad God doesn't want anyone to be left out. Know you are his child; and like an excited child, tell them about him and invite (or in your own way shepherd) all your friends, indeed anyone, to his party!

Rev Jonathan de Kretser