

FIRST READING – A EASTER 4

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

When the days of Pentecost had come,
Peter, standing with the eleven,
raised his voice and addressed the crowd.
“Let the entire house of Israel know with certainty
that God has made him both Lord and Christ,
this Jesus whom you crucified.”
Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart
and said to Peter and to the other apostles,
“Brothers, what should we do?”
Peter said to them,
“Repent, and be baptised every one of you
in the name of Jesus Christ
so that your sins may be forgiven;
and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
For the promise is for you, for your children,
and for all who are far away,
everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.”
And he testified with many other arguments
and exhorted them, saying,
“Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”
So those who welcomed his message were baptized,
and that day were added about three thousand souls.

Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING – A EASTER 4

A reading from the first letter of Saint Peter.

Pause - and look up at the assembly

Beloved:

If you endure when you do right and suffer for it,
you have God's approval.

For to this you have been called,
because Christ also suffered for you,
leaving you an example,
so that you should follow in his steps.

“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

When he was abused, he did not return abuse;
when he suffered, he did not threaten;

but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.

Christ himself bore our sins in his body on the Cross,
so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness;

by his wounds you have been healed.

For you were going astray like sheep,

but now you have returned
to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

Pause for **THREE** seconds

then look up at the people

and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – A EASTER 4

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord

Jesus said:

“Very truly, I tell you,
anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate
but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit.
The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.
The gatekeeper opens the gate for him,
and the sheep hear his voice.
He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.
When he has brought out all his own,
he goes ahead of them,
and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.
They will not follow a stranger,
but they will run from him
because they do not know the voice of strangers.”
Jesus used this figure of speech with them,
but they did not understand what he was saying to them.
So again Jesus said to them,
“Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.
All who came before me are thieves and bandits;
but the sheep did not listen to them.
I am the gate.
Whoever enters by me will be saved,
and will come in and go out and find pasture.
The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.
I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

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

The first lection here gives the tail end of Peter's kerygmatic sermon at Pentecost (a substantial part of which was read last Sunday) and goes on to indicate the response of his hearers.

The conclusion of the sermon sums up the whole kerygma in a single christological formula: "God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Such a statement puzzles those who approach the New Testament with the presuppositions of later dogmatics.

It looks like "adoptionism"—the view that Jesus was a man who was made divine at his resurrection, the later heresy that a colleague of mine once wittily defined as the theory that Jesus was a man but graduated in divinity with honors.

This, however, is to read back the later ontological Christology of the patristic church into the Hebraic parts of the New Testament. Hebrew thought viewed matters in functional rather than ontological categories (see Gregory Dix's book *Jew and Greek*). "Lord" and "Messiah" are functional terms, meaning that from the Resurrection onward, the risen and exalted One exercised the functions of Messiah and Kyrios.

Henceforth he rules over his people, forgives them, nourishes them with his word and sacraments, and commands their obedience.

All that God does toward his people is done through Christ. All God's acts bring along with them, as it were, the salvation that Jesus wrought in his earthly history. It is as important to say that Jesus is Lord and Messiah as it is to say that Jesus is Lord and Messiah.

The response that preaching evokes is, "What should we do?" The answer is, "Repent and be baptized." Repentance in this context does not merely mean sorrow for past individual sins but a radical reassessment of Jesus and his significance.

By crucifying him, Jesus' contemporaries rejected him. For them, he was not the emissary of God, the bringer of salvation, but either an impostor or a deluded fanatic. Now they must reassess him: he is the emissary of God and the bringer of salvation. Baptism is the event in and through which converts are brought into the sphere of his salvation.

They receive forgiveness of sins, which again has a far richer meaning than the remission of individual peccadilloes—it means God's eschatological salvation in its wholeness. And they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, for baptism "adds" them to the Spirit-bearing community.

Responsorial Psalm 23:1-2a, 3b-4, 5, 6*

The theme of Christ as Good Shepherd, which used to belong to the second Sunday after Easter, has been transferred to this Sunday. This, the most familiar of psalms, introduces the shepherd passages in the second reading and the gospel.

In the original psalm, it was YHWH who was the Shepherd. When the Greek-speaking Christians adopted the title Kyrios for the exalted Christ, as a translation of the Aramaic *marī* (cf. *Marana tha*), the consequence was that many of the passages in the Greek New Testament that spoke about YHWH-Kyrios were transferred to Christ-Kyrios.

This did not involve any compromise of Old Testament Jewish monotheism. It meant that henceforth the exalted Christ is that aspect of the being of God that is turned toward us in saving action.

Ultimately, of course, this would lead to the formation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Meanwhile, even the earliest Church believed that God acts in us through the exalted Christ. Through him God exercises his Lordship, which includes his work as Shepherd, the one who nourishes and defends his people.

Reading II: 1 Peter 2:20b-25

This is the traditional epistle for Good Shepherd Sunday. We recall that the materials used in this letter were taken from a baptismal homily. The author is exhorting his readers to be patient. He holds up Christ in his passion as an example, quoting an early hymn that draws upon the Suffering Servant Song in Isaiah 53.

But, as so often happened when things were quoted, the author continues to quote when he gets beyond the point he wishes to make, and speaks of Christ's passion not merely as an example of patience but as redemptive: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross."

Note that RSV has "tree," an early Christian designation for the cross, recalling with defiant apologetic the Deuteronomic curse on all who hanged upon a tree.

Christ's wounds bring healing, and by his redemptive death we are enabled to die to sin and live to righteousness.

At this point the writer turns from the hymn to his readers. He recalls their conversion and tells them that, having strayed, they have now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian (the Greek word is *episkopos*, "bishop") of their souls.

This last phrase throws an interesting sidelight on the development of the church's ministry by the time 1 Peter was written. While formally it was the ministerial designations (shepherd-pastor and bishop) that provided christological titles, it was really the other way around.

The church's ministers are bishops and shepherds because it is through them that the risen Christ exercises his shepherding and overseeing.

Gospel: John 10:1-10

There is a long and complicated history behind the discourse of the Good Shepherd. It begins with a fusion of two parables (vv. 1-3a and 3b-5).

In the first parable the picture is of a sheepfold into which two parties seek to enter—a prowler and the shepherd himself. The second parable concerns the relationship between the sheep and the shepherd on the one hand, and the stranger on the other.

The combined parables are followed by an allegorical interpretation in which the Johannine Christ successively identifies himself with the gate and the shepherd.

Today New Testament scholars would regard the two parables as originally separate and possibly authentic parables of Jesus. The fusion must have happened in oral transmission, while the allegorical interpretation would be the work of the evangelist himself.

The first parable is a challenge to Israel's religious authorities. Will they accept Jesus' message? This challenge must belong to the final part of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem.

In the second parable, the situation is earlier in Jesus' ministry. He can offer no external credentials for his authority, but there are those who respond in faith to his message because they hear in it the authentic voice of God.

In the last analysis, both identifications of Jesus—gate and shepherd—make the same point. The risen Christ is the One who nourishes his people in his word and sacraments, giving them life and enabling them to have it abundantly.

Reginald H. Fuller,
Daniel Westberg