

God's Word for This Week

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Sunday 3rd May 2020

THE COLLECT OF THE DAY

Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life:
Raise us, who trust in him,
from the death of sin to the life of righteousness,
that we may seek those things which are above,
where he reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

THE FIRST READING - Acts 2: 42-47

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds* to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home* and ate their food with glad and generous* hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

THE EPISTLE - 1 Peter 2: 19-25


¹⁹For it is to your credit if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. ²⁰If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, where is the credit in that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. ²¹For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

²²'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.' ²³When 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. ²⁴He 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. ²⁵For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

THE GOSPEL READING - John 10: 1-10

10 '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. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.' ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁷ So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.



1 The Lord is my shepherd;
therefore can I lack nothing.
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures
and leads me beside still waters.
3 He shall refresh my soul
and guide me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
4 Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
5 You spread a table before me
in the presence of those who trouble me;
you have anointed my head with oil
and my cup shall be full.
6 Surely goodness and loving mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

PSALM 23

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

On the First Reading

⁴⁴'All who believed were together and had all things in common..' (Acts 2:44)

Following the death and resurrection of our Lord, his followers increased in number and there was an excitement no doubt in the air! People drew together into communities and houses; gathering around food and meals as directed by Christ himself – an act that was still very fresh in their minds. At this time of great change for Jesus' followers, we can observe their willingness and openness to embrace the Spirit which was to come at Pentecost. It is as if, in response to desperately uncertain times, the people of God began to flourish in themselves with the same resilience and trust witnessed in the Israelites in the time of Moses. Today, we witness this afresh in humanity's outreach in pandemic and in the face of an uncertain future. Surely this refreshes our belief in humankind and our witness to God's presence actively at work in this world.

We give thanks to God today, for his eternal presence with us, in all aspects of our lives and in this world; grateful also for those who began this outreach 2,000 years ago, giving us the faith and traditions we hold fast to today in the face of uncertainty.

On the Second Reading

²⁵For you were going astray like sheep,

but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.' (1 Peter 2:25)

Suffering is very much in the forefront of our lives today as we witness lives lost through contracting Covid19. It is easy for us to question God's part in this suffering. The words of the Epistle this morning very much place God at the coalface of this suffering and in the midst of it with those who are sick and those who care for them. God chose to witness first hand suffering by taking on human form and enduring the worst of suffering and humiliation at the hands of a people that had no idea of anything other than their own way in the world. Still, we are told, he buffeted the abuse and by doing this he allowed it no further progression and no further power over him.

It's very hard to continue an argument with someone who refuses to return the same negativity.

Father, we see through your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, the immense strength to face into extreme suffering and remain steadfast in love. Enable us this day to reflect his love in our intentions and prayers; in our relationships and circumstances. Give us courage and an open-heartedness that seeks only to reconcile rather than continue any negative intentions. Draw close to those who suffer this day that they may know your eternal presence with them through all that they go through.

On the Gospel Reading

⁹ '...I am the gate.

Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.' (John 10:9)

I believe it was customary for shepherds in Jesus' time (and even today) who found themselves in the great outdoors and the middle of nowhere close to nightfall, to cobble together a form of sheep fold or pen comprised of briars, branches, stones – anything they could find. Its purpose was a temporary one but it was something that would keep the sheep together at least during the night time and provide some form of protection from marauding beasts and creatures dangerous to the flock. This construct would have a natural gap left in it to allow access. What is most poignant is that the shepherd would place him or herself in the gap of the fold as the doorway or the gatekeeper. Doing so meant that the shepherd would be the first person any harmful creature would encounter between the outside world and the sheep. A courageous place to volunteer one's self to be!

Perhaps one way of looking a little more deeply at Jesus' wonderful ability to use the images most familiar to those he was addressing, is to see the 'fold' as the Kingdom (the understanding or consciousness of how to 'be' as God's people) and the sheep as those who understand this consciousness and live by it. Jesus then is the way by which a person comes to this understanding. He makes it clear that many may come and offer perspectives about the right way to 'be' or live but it is he who not only shows us God's way, but he *is* the way! It is he who can set about a transformation within ourselves. He doesn't 'stand back' and offer us access, if you look closely. *Becoming* the gate, Jesus invites us to go *through* him such a deeply profound way that changes begin to take place within ourselves and our lives (and the lives around us) are transformed.

Now we have life in abundance!

Gatekeeper, help us to invest anew in you today; to continuously follow your voice, the voice we know and love so well. In this life and the next. Amen.