

## Fr James' homily for the Fourth Sunday of Easter 2020

First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 2:14, 36-41  
Second Reading: First Letter of St Peter 2: 20-25  
Gospel: John 10:1-10

This fourth Sunday of Easter is, unofficially, also known as “Good Shepherd Sunday.” The Gospel on this Sunday always shows us one of those passages where Jesus uses the image of a shepherd about himself. Today we hear from the Gospel told by John and it is one of the most endearing, even humorous, shepherd episodes. Jesus calls himself the shepherd...but when his audience fail to follow, he is almost desperate to make himself understood, referring to himself then as the very gate to the sheepfold, as well as the shepherd. It is all a bit surreal, BUT, this underlines our basic Easter preaching: Christ is risen, because in Jesus God will go to the most extreme limits to bring redemption and life to his sheep “and those sheep you,” as a hymn has it.

On this Sunday each year we pray especially for vocations to the priesthood and religious life, the shepherd vocations. Here is a [link](#) to the diocesan website with news of our seminarians and a reflection by Bishop Sherrington and here is a [link](#) to an inspiring but less-seen BBC story of one vocation. Pray for this young man and for more like him to answer God's call.

It is fitting that the bulk of the scriptures today are about the first Chief Shepherd of God's Church: St Peter. In the first reading we see St Peter doing what every Chief Shepherd is called to do, what his successor Pope Francis does today: to preach Christ risen from the dead, and what follows from this - that all must come to the well of the sacraments, of Baptism and Reconciliation, in order to live. It is painful today to hear that call to the open door of the Church when our doors are of necessity closed.

So let us ponder a little what St Peter writes in the second reading. A letter written to a suffering, persecuted, and possibly physically locked down church some years later. We are all being bombarded with suggestions of what to do during lockdown, but if you have time, spend it reading the smaller Epistles in the New Testament: the letters of Peter, the letters of John, even of James! They are written to YOU containing practical wisdom from the shepherds of the Church to people who feel isolated and even abandoned.

Peter writes that enduring suffering and hardship brought to us for doing the right thing is full of merit, by which he means doing this is a life-giving thing. He then

speaks eloquently, unbearably poignantly of the endurance of Jesus in the face of unjust punishment: unbearable because he always knows that he, Peter, had contributed to this suffering in his denial of Jesus. Jesus' endurance he knows from hard experience brings life and holiness. It brings resurrection.

We have seen these themes in the teaching of Jesus many times. If we suffer because we have done wrong, well, that is just what you expect. When we suffer injustice, it is very tempting to pay back in kind. Bearing with these things patiently, though, is a source of merit. Or again, being kind only to those who are kind to you - looking after number one - is the way of the world. Remember Jesus had said, if that is all you do, what is it worth? "Bless those who curse you."

Easter means we do not chose the way of the world. Every time we soak up the injustice and return something better, we are with Christ. The "merit" in St Peter's words is that in these things we are sharing the way of Jesus, the passion of Jesus, we are part of the redemptive work of Jesus. We are truly loving, that is, doing what is best for the other, despite everything.

Today we see lots of selfless action around us in the examples of key workers and carers. Amazing sacrifices. All of this shows a basic longing in us, if we but knew it, for the life of God. It is a selfless action too to STAY HOME, or to be isolated from suffering loved ones for the common good. Doing these simple, but for us increasingly costly and burdensome things, builds up in us a strength by which we can tap into the divine love that is our only hope in the long run.

Peter the once lost sheep puts it in Easter words: "*By his wounds you have been healed.....you have come back to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.*" Read these few lines of the second reading today as part of your act of contrition and spiritual communion. They will help to make lockdown a source of holiness for us.

Amen.

Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a happy continuing of the Easter season. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch.