

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER – B

The fourth Sunday of Easter is called Good Shepherd Sunday. The gospel reading for this Sunday in the three year cycle is taken from John 10 where Jesus speaks of himself as the 'the gate of the sheepfold,' Year A, 'the good shepherd' Year B and in Year C as the one who gives the sheep 'eternal life.' In Jesus' day a shepherd led his sheep to safe pastures, watched over them and brought them back if they strayed and finally led them back to the safety of the sheepfold. In the spiritual sense this is how we understand Jesus' personal care for each one of us. The first reading from Acts is another of Peter's speeches this time before the Sanhedrin explaining that it is solely in the name of Jesus, risen from the dead, that he is able to heal the sick. The second reading continues with John's letter and speaks of God's love which he 'has lavished upon us.'

The **First Reading** is from Acts of the Apostles. This New Testament book is part two of a history of the rise of Christianity, the first part being the gospel according to Luke. They became separated when, about 150 A.D., Christians wanted the four gospel accounts bound together in one volume. The author, Luke, is a Syrian from Antioch, a doctor of non-Jewish origin, who was a close friend of Paul accompanying him on his second and third missionary journeys. Luke collected a great deal of evidence from a variety of sources which he edited. The book deals with the primitive Jerusalem community under Peter's leadership, the spread of Christianity to Samaria, to the gentile peoples and the early days of Christianity in Antioch. From chapter 13 Luke deals with Paul's three missionary journeys and ends with Paul a prisoner in Rome.

The reading, 4.8-12, is Peter's explanation to the question from the Sanhedrin, 'by what power, and by whose name, have you men done this?' (i.e. cured the cripple in the Temple, see Acts 3.1-10.) Luke tells us that Peter is 'filled with the Holy Spirit' and he explains to the assembled court that it is by the power and authority of 'Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified and God raised from the dead' that this man is healed. Peter then teaches that Jesus is the foundation stone upon which God is building enabling all mankind to attain salvation. (To get the background to this reading read from Acts 3.1 if you have time.)

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 118. 1, 8-9, 21-23, 26, 28-29, is one of the six Hallel Psalms (113-118), psalms which the Jews recited on their great feasts including the Passover supper. They are songs in praise of God. Psalm 118 is a psalm of thanksgiving and may have been sung as the procession entered the Temple during the feast of Tabernacles. For the early Christians the Lord's 'love has no end' and in time of difficulty 'it is better to take refuge in the Lord than trust in princes.' In the second verse we have the quote Peter uses before the court and the work that the Lord has achieved is indeed 'a marvel in our eyes.' The last verse is a perfect response to the confidence Peter showed before the Jewish authorities, 'I will thank you for you have given answer.' In reciting this psalm we can give thanks that Peter was filled with the Spirit and able to proclaim the truth.

The **Second Reading** is from the first letter of St John. There are three letters attributed to John the first being the most important, possibly written at the same time as the gospel. This letter was written to the Christian communities of Asia (Turkey) because they were suffering near disintegration due to some early heresies which were afflicting the Church. In the introduction the writer says he wants to share what he has 'seen and heard', his experiences, with his readers. He picks out three main points 1. To live in the light of Christ and he lists four conditions to live such a life. 2. To live as God's children with three conditions necessary, and 3. He speaks of the source of love and faith. Love is from God so we must love, and faith in Christ Jesus is necessary to overcome the world. The letter ends with two supplementary points.

The reading, 3.1-2, is taken from the section of the letter where the writer is encouraging us to live as God's children. We should prayerfully think of the love that God has lavished upon us through his Son's life, death and resurrection as a result of which we, through faith, have become God's children. The world cannot understand because of its refusal to acknowledge the One God sent but this must not deter us from our belief that we are God's children and, although we don't know what the future holds, we are certain we shall be like God 'because we shall see him as he really is.' Such confidence and depth of faith in the early Church should be an inspiration for all believers.