

4th Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

This is the conclusion of Peter's Pentecost sermon. Here he is, freshly filled with the Holy Spirit just 50 days after the Resurrection and 10 days after the Ascension.

14Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed:

36“Let the whole house of Israel know This fulfills the commands of Jesus that his gift of salvation should be preached first in Jerusalem and that his first concern must be for the lost sheep of the house of Israel.² for certain that God has made both Lord and Christ, this Jesus This is a proclamation of the messianic kingship of Jesus.³ (CCC 440) It was a royal title used for the kings of Israel as well as a divine title used in the Greek to translate the name “Yahweh.”⁷ whom you crucified.”

37Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, “What are we to do, my brothers?”

38Peter said to them, Note that while ALL are asked, it is Peter who responds, speaking for them all just as the pope often speaks for the college of bishops today.⁹ “Repent This means to change their lives and turn to God and undergo a real conversion. Pope Paul VI expanded on this idea when he said that it involves a change of outlook and it applies to the state of sinful man, who needs to change his ways and turn to God, desirous of breaking away from his sins and repenting and calling on God’s mercy.⁸ and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ This marks a difference from the “baptism of John,” which was for repentance, to the baptism in the name of Jesus, which was a ritual of initiation.⁵ The form for Baptism that is approved by the Church is “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” which is the formula used in Matthew 28:19 and is the same form that was written in the teaching of the Apostles called, “The Didache,” the oldest Jewish-Christian document we possess apart from the Bible.⁴ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The two principal effects of Baptism are: *purification from sins*, including original sin, and *new birth in the Holy Spirit*⁵ (CCC 1262) whereby we become children of God.³ (CCC 1265) One of the changes the Holy Spirit makes within us at Baptism is to give our souls an indelible mark that cannot be erased. This mark is permanent and cannot be repeated.³ (CCC 1280)

39For the promise This refers to the promise to Abraham of blessings from God.⁵ is made to you and to your children This helps in our understanding that children are to be baptized. Whole households were baptized in the early church and there is explicit testimony to this practice from the second century on.³ (CCC 1252) and to all those far off, Peter assures them that this offer of salvation extends to future generations and to distant lands.¹ whomever the Lord our God will call.”

40He testified with many other arguments, and was exhorting them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Primitive Jewish Christianity considered the unbelieving Jews a source of perdition from which one must dissociate oneself to be saved.⁶ These words refer not only to that part of the Jewish people who rejected Christ and his teaching, but to everyone who is estranged from God.¹⁷

41Those who accepted his message were baptized, Note that from the very day of Pentecost the Church has celebrated and administered holy Baptism.³ (CCC 1226) and about three thousand persons were added that day. Peter had cowered when even an association with Jesus had been

suggested by the serving maid of the high priest on the night of Jesus' arrest and trial. Now, here is Peter crying out, welcoming such an association between himself and Jesus before the whole assembly of Israel. Only grace could do that! The same grace that is at work *in* Peter seems to be at work *through* Peter, whose courageous proclamation of the Gospel draws thousands of souls into that grace.² Mathematically, each of the Apostles must have baptized about 250 people that day!

1 Peter 2: 20b-25

Today's reading comes from the section of Peter's letter concerning the behavior of Christian slaves. In the Roman Empire there were as many as 60 million slaves who did all the work. They were mostly prisoners taken in war and they made up by far the greatest portion of the early church.¹⁹ Slave masters were not always just in their treatment of their slaves. This passage urges those unjustly treated to identify themselves with Jesus, who took the form of a slave and was unjustly treated himself. Though the text was first addressed to slaves, today it is addressed to all of us for we are all called to be servants as Jesus was and we all experience suffering and injustice.¹ No one escapes suffering in this life. We strive to relieve it, we do all we can to minimize it, and there may be times when we resent it bitterly. But it is a fact of life that cannot be denied. Jesus made it clear by the example of his ministry that suffering is to be relieved whenever possible. Peter's message is that, given the fact of human suffering, we can find strength to endure it through the example of Jesus' own redemptive suffering. In itself, suffering is an evil, the consequence of a fallen world. It will have no place in God's eternal reign. But in the meantime it can be for us an occasion of grace. The Christian sees suffering as an opportunity to bring good out of evil, just as Jesus did.¹¹ Verses 21 to 25 are a reworking of the Servant Song of Isaiah 53.¹

Beloved:

20If you are patient when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God. "The prayer of pain is the most powerful and effective way to obtain graces from God. By offering our trials in union with the sacrifice of the Cross, particularly at Mass, we become co-redeemers with Christ. We draw down from Heaven grace and mercy upon ourselves, our families, our country and the whole body of Christ throughout the world, in proportion to the gravity of our specific trials, our interior dispositions and above all, our love.¹²

21For to this you have been called, We are called to the patient sufferings of unjust wrongs.¹ because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps. Christ in his suffering is the pattern for Christian suffering. No matter how great our trials, they will never be as great or as unjust as those of our Lord. The Catechism has a wonderful comment on the Anointing of the Sick: "By the grace of this sacrament the sick person receives the strength and the gift of uniting himself more closely to Christ's Passion for in a certain way HE IS CONSECRATED TO BEAR FRUIT BY CONFIGURATION TO THE SAVIOR'S REDEMPTIVE PASSION!³ (CCC 1521)

22He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.

23When he was insulted, he returned no insult; when he suffered, he did not threaten; instead, he handed himself over to the one who judges justly. This refers to God who in the Jewish burial service is called the "Righteous (or just) Judge". Thus the meaning is "Not my will but yours be done."¹⁸

24He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. Rev. William Most has explained that every sin brings with it a disturbance of the universal order. A sinner takes from the one pan of the scales

what he has no right to take; the scale is out of balance. It is the Holiness of God, which loves so greatly everything that is right, that wants it rebalanced. How can it be done? If the sinner stole property, he begins to rebalance by giving it back. If he stole a pleasure, he begins to rebalance by giving up instead some other satisfaction he could have lawfully had. All sinners took so much to themselves by sinning (the total weight from even one mortal sin is infinite!) What of the weight of all sins of OUR times, of all sins of ALL times! Jesus, who owed nothing, who had no debt, nonetheless, willed to take on all of these sins to make salvation abundantly possible for us. Clearly, we owe Christ a debt for what our sins have caused him. If someone offends even an ordinary person, we do not say that he should just forget it. No, he owes an apology, some makeup for the offense. Obviously, there is an immense need for reparation to Our Lord, for it was our sins that caused such literally incomprehensible suffering to Him.¹²

25For you had gone astray like sheep, but you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls. This shepherd and guardian is Christ.¹⁵ The Hebrew way of thinking does not separate souls from persons; therefore, to say that Jesus watches over your soul means simply that he watches over you.¹⁸

John 10:1-10

Today's reading takes place about four months before Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection. This discourse appears immediately after Jesus' healing of the man blind from birth. At the end of that story, Jesus was addressing the Pharisees who didn't think they were blind—here he is still addressing the Pharisees.¹⁷ This section is written with Ezekiel 34 in mind. In that passage, the prophet chastised the authorities of his own time for their misdeeds and sloth, their greed and neglect of their responsibility. He then prophesied that God would take the flock away from them and become the shepherd himself. Finally he would appoint another shepherd after the figure of David. All of this comes true in Jesus, who is himself the Messiah and the Son of David. Jesus presents himself as this shepherd who looks after his sheep, seeks out the strays, cures the crippled and carries the weak on his shoulders thereby fulfilling the ancient prophecies.¹⁶

Jesus said:

1“Amen, amen, The double “amen” is a clue that tells us that the following words are of extreme importance.¹⁴ I say to you, whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate The sheepfold was a stonewall enclosure with a single entryway used to protect flocks at night from thieves and predators. One shepherd stood guard alone to protect the fold. Near dawn he would open the little door to the shepherds who came to claim their flocks. Each shepherd gave his own particular call and his sheep would come crowding to the door and trot out one by one to follow him. Only the shepherd of each flock would be recognized and admitted by the designated gatekeeper.¹⁴ but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber. These are the Pharisees who did not recognize the voice of God in Jesus and who did not lead the flock faithfully.¹

2But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. While Jesus is the shepherd of the sheep in this parable, the word “pastor” means “shepherd” in Latin.²⁰

3The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice, as the shepherd calls his own sheep by name The Catechism tells us that God calls each one of us by name and the name that we receive in Baptism is our name for all eternity.³ (CCC 2159) and leads them out. The sheep would wait until they heard the special cry of their own shepherd. Because the sheep are raised mostly for wool, they are often with the shepherd for years. Thus, each flock of sheep would go out by the

little gate in obedience to the cries of their own shepherd.¹⁴ In this metaphor, the sheep are those who hear the voice of Jesus and follow him wherever he goes.¹³ In Matthew Jesus says that at the final judgment only the sheep will end up at His right hand! (Mt 25:33)

4When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice.

5But they will not follow a stranger; they will run away from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers.”

6Although Jesus used this figure of speech, the Pharisees did not realize what he was trying to tell them. The Pharisees exemplify Jesus’ point by failing to understand his meaning: they are not the sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd.¹⁵

7So Jesus said again, “Amen, amen, Remember that this means that Jesus is going to say something that is very important! I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep. In the first part of this reading, Jesus identified himself as the true shepherd of God’s sheep. Now, he identifies himself with the gate of the sheepfold. He is applying the significance of the gate as put forth in the first verse of our reading today. Those who have come to the fold through him, the apostles and their successors, are legitimate shepherds.¹⁷ According to Vatican II, the Church is also a sheepfold and the sole and necessary gateway to it is also Jesus Christ.¹⁶

8All who came before me are thieves and robbers, This refers to the shepherds of Israel, many of whom were denounced by the prophets as worthless and evil. The Pharisees are their spiritual descendants.¹³ However, he is not condemning Moses nor all the prophets nor John the Baptist for they proclaimed the future Messiah and prepared the way for him. He is referring to the false prophets and deceivers of the people.¹⁶ but the sheep did not listen to them.

9I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. The implication here is that elsewhere one may not be so safe! When animals come and dwell with men they become dependent on them for nearly everything: food, protection, even birthing their young. Jesus invites us to see ourselves in that role of utter dependence on Him. He invites us to enter in and be kept safe by Him.²

10A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life Here he refers to Divine life.¹³ and have it more abundantly.”

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers” by Lawrence E. Mick, (2) Commentary Notes of Sean Innerst and Tim Gray, (3) “Catechism Of The Catholic Church,” (4) “Lord Have Mercy” by Scott Hahn, (5) “The Acts of the Apostles” by Luke Timothy Johnson, (6) “The Acts Of The Apostles” by Johannes Munck, (7) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles” With Introduction, Commentary and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (8) “The Navarre Bible: Acts Of The Apostles,” (9) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary,” (10) “The Navarre Bible: Catholic Epistles,” (11) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2002” by Aelred R. Rosser, (12) “Suffering: A Key To The Meaning Of Life” by John F. Downs, (13) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of John” With Introduction, Commentary and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (14) “The Catholic Bible Study: John” by Stephen K. Ray, (15) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (16) “The Navarre Bible: St. John,” (17) The St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology Online founded by Dr. Scott Hahn, (18) “Jewish New Testament Commentary,” (19) “The Letters Of James And Peter” by William Barclay, and (20) “Catholic Source Book” Edited by Rev. Peter Klein.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.