

4th Sunday of Easter - B

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Acts 4:8-12

As Peter and John spoke to the people at Solomon's Portico (last week's reading) the priests, the captain of the Temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them. The teaching of Peter and John upset them because the apostles were teaching that in Jesus there was resurrection of the dead – a doctrine specifically rejected by the Sadducees. Peter and John were seized and held overnight in jail (meanwhile, the numbers of men who believed grew to five thousand). The next day Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin. What we hear today is Peter's address to the Sanhedrin. It is an apology of the faith rather than a sermon. After this address to the Sanhedrin Peter and John were released.

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, answered them,

Recall that in Luke 12:11-12 Jesus says "When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say." Here, that promise is fulfilled.

"Leaders of the people and elders: ⁹ If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a cripple, namely, by what means he was saved,

The focus seems to have changed from resurrection to healing, but not really. The apostles display the power of the resurrected Lord as we shall see.

¹⁰ then all of you and all the people of Israel should know that it was in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean

The name is the person and all that he represents.

whom you crucified,

Put to death.

whom God raised from the dead;

Resurrected.

in his name

This person (name) Jesus has power through which He allows others to work miracles and accomplish great things.

this man stands before you healed.

The crippled man who has been healed – visible proof of the power is standing in their midst.

¹¹ He is ‘the stone rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.’

Peter is addressing the religious leaders of the community and quotes to them Psalm 118:22 (Psalm 118 is the last Psalm in the Great Hallel which was sung between the third and fourth cups of the Passover meal just a few days earlier). Some translations render this as “capstone” rather than “cornerstone” (read Psalm 118:22-24).

¹² There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved.”

The Psalm says that we are to rejoice and this is why. The Messiah has arrived and opened heaven so that salvation is possible. No longer are all souls trapped in sheol – they can enter heaven in anticipation of the resurrection.

2nd Reading - 1 John 3:1-2

Having taught about repentance and re-ordering of our lives to follow Our Father’s plan, John now teaches what it means to be a part of God’s covenant family. Affirming the present reality of God’s love in making the Christians “children of God” has three consequences: 1) Christians do not belong to the world, which failed to receive Jesus. 2) Christians will lead lives of holiness like Christ. 3) Christians are confident of an even greater salvation in the future.

^{3:1} See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are.

As in the beatitudes, to be “called” is to be “called by God.” In the language of the Bible, when God gives someone a name, He is not simply conferring a title or means of identification but is causing the thing which the name indicates. The word of God is efficacious, it does what it says it will do. This is why Saint John adds “Yet so we are.” This is not a metaphorical title, a legal fiction, or adoption human-style. God has gratuitously given men a strictly supernatural dignity, an intimacy with God whereby we are members of His household with the right of inheritance.

“By writing these things John is exhorting his readers to recognize what it means to be born again of God. He tells them that they are now worthy to be loved as children of God, even in this world, and that the adoption of sons is a reality here and now. For since we now know in part and have the first fruits of the Spirit, we already have something of the adoption of sons and can see what the fullness of it will be like when it arrives.” [Didymus the Blind (ca. A.D. 390), *Commentary on 1 John*]

The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

This calls to mind Jesus' words at the Last Supper "The hour is coming whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father, or me" (John 16:2-3).

² Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Although we know now that we are God's children, we have not fully experienced it because the seeds of divine life which it contains will only reach their full growth in eternal life, when we see Him "as He is," "face-to-face." When we do see God face-to-face, we will be like Christ, whose relation to God is unique – He is the first-born Son.

Gospel - John 10:11-18

This Sunday is often called "Good Shepherd Sunday" because of this reading. In the ancient Middle East, shepherds did not "drive" their sheep, they led them. The sheep were very close to the shepherd, almost like pets. They knew the voice of their own shepherd, and would only follow him. The shepherd led them to food and water; he protected them from predators; he searched for them when they were lost. Jesus is our Good Shepherd, He provides for us, protects us, saves us from danger.

¹¹ I am the good shepherd.

This is good in the sense of "noble" or "ideal" rather than the sense of being "good at" something. He is the "true" or "perfect" shepherd.

A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

This is not an exaggeration to fit the occasion, the Israelite shepherd frequently risked his life to save his sheep. In a far more significant way Jesus has laid down His life for the sheep of God.

¹² A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them. ¹³ This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep.

Like the Pharisees who have no personal commitment to the welfare of the Jews – they work only for their own interests.

¹⁴ I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep.

The relationship between Jesus and the Church is analogous to the close relationship between Jesus

and His Father. This relationship is the basis for the sacrifice that Jesus makes on behalf of the sheep.

¹⁶ I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice,

The Gentiles, too, must be brought into salvation together with the sheep from the fold of Israel. The way to eternal life is the same for both – that they hear in Jesus the voice of God and respond with faith.

and there will be one flock, one shepherd.

A single Church under the one shepherd – Christ [and His appointed visible shepherd, His vicar (see John 21:15-18)].

¹⁷ This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own.

A sacrifice that the Son performs in complete harmony with the will of the Father.

I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again.

The crucifixion and resurrection are the two aspects of the glorification of Christ. In His exaltation Christ takes up life not only for Himself but also for all who live through His work of salvation.

This command I have received from my Father.”

The condition of the efficacy of Christ’s work is the entire freedom of His obedience.