

RETURN TO THE SHEPHERD  
By Al Mansfield  
FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 2:14,36-41  
Psalm 23  
1 Peter 2:20-25  
John 10:1-10

RETURN TO THE SHEPHERD

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is called Good Shepherd Sunday because the gospel is taken from John 10, the "Good Shepherd" chapter. Jesus is the "shepherd and guardian of your souls," as the second reading says. The Good Shepherd is always out looking for lost sheep and those who have strayed. The call of the liturgy today to them and to all of us is "return to the Shepherd."

ACTS

During these Sundays in the Easter Season, we have been hearing St. Peter's Pentecost Sermon. Today's first reading brings us to the climax of this message: "Let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made both Lord and Christ this Jesus whom you crucified."

The sermon hits home. The listeners were "cut to the heart." In answer to their question, "What are we to do?" Peter tells them to repent and be baptized. Then their sins will be forgiven and they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Peter's exhortation, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation," is as true and relevant today as when it was first proclaimed. What if every sermon had results like this one from St. Peter - massive conversions, baptisms, and some three thousand believers added to the Church!

1 PETER

Our second reading portrays the suffering Christ as an example for us, especially if we are unjustly persecuted for doing the right thing. Jesus was led like a "lamb to the slaughter and he opened not his mouth" (cf. Isaiah 53:7).

Peter proclaims that Jesus has suffered for us and "by his wounds you have been healed." As sheep we had all gone astray but Peter says, "you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls."

GOSPEL

Jesus gives two images in John 10. He describes himself as the **Good Shepherd**, whose sheep hear his voice and follow him. Jesus also calls himself the **gate** for the sheep. Those who want to act as shepherds, that is, pastors of the flock, must go in through him.

Jesus describes the devil, the enemy of our salvation, as "a thief (who) comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it abundantly." Words from the Good Shepherd to take to heart in the midst of this "corrupt generation."

THE SHEPHERD AND THE GATE

Most of us have probably visited someone who lives in a gated community. You have to know the gate code or perhaps show your driver's license to get in. The idea is to make sure that whoever does get in is legit - that is, they belong there. Jesus presents himself as the Shepherd of our souls and also as the gate to the sheepfold. If

we want to be saved, we have to go through the gate - Jesus. Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

The gate also keeps out any false shepherds, who would want to harm, mislead, or take advantage of the sheep. Blessed be Jesus - the Good Shepherd and the Good Gate!