

OPENING COLLECT

Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life: raise us, who trust in him, from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, that we may seek those things which are above, where he reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING: Acts 2.42-47

Many were baptized and were added to the community. ⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And, day by day, the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Or Genesis 7

Our reading from Acts continues the story of the Easter faith becoming a reality in God's people. Following Peter's persuasive preaching, last week's reading, 3000 were baptised. Now Luke records, this week, that, as their common life developed, "the Lord added to their number"! Having repented or changed their minds about the way they were living, and come to belief, they were baptised and set out on a new way of life. This is beautifully described in today's passage, which has always been seen as a great model for the church today, or in any age.

OR The Genesis reading is part of the 'flood story'. Noah is said to survive because he is 'a good man'. However, we are surely not saved by being good, but because we respond, as we are, to the love of God, revealed in Christ.

SECOND READING: 1 Peter 2.19-25

Brothers and sisters: ¹⁹ It is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. ²⁰ If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. ²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. ²² 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.' ²³ When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

Having, as we have seen in previous weeks, challenged his young baptised to keep the faith and having reminded them of their new state of life, the writer turns to admonition, as to the way in which they should live. First he exhorts them to be subject to human institutions and to live as 'servants of God, honouring all men, loving the brethren, fearing God and honouring the Emperor (2.17). Then he gives a series of instructions; to wives, to husbands (ch.3), and here, not to 'brothers and sisters' as our text suggests, but to 'household slaves', who, he says in v.18, must respect their masters, whatever they are like! To make this clear, he draws on the example of Christ and challenges them to follow it. He exhorts behaviour, which should mark the life of any disciple in the Kingdom; of any true servant of God, whatever their job or status.

Epistle continued:

Gospel: John 10.1-10

Jesus said to the Pharisees: 1 'Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. 2 The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.' 6 Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. 7 So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'

This week and next, the Gospel passages, from St John's Gospel, focus, in a similar way to today's Epistle, on the way to live the Christian life in the new post-resurrection world. This Gospel passage is, at first glance, a little ambiguous, for it is not absolutely clear whether Jesus is being seen as 'gate', 'gatekeeper' or 'shepherd'! On balance, in the context of John's thinking and in the light of the three-fold command of the risen Lord to Peter to 'feed my sheep', the thrust is probably best seen as urging the disciple, and certainly the Minister, to follow Christ and become a good shepherd, by using Jesus as the gate, through which to lead the people along the right way- the way of love. The shepherd needs to use the correct gate/door if the people are to move from one good pasture to another. To put it another way, the good shepherd should follow the example, and heed the advice of Jesus, if he or she would lead others along the right path; the path that leads to good pasture and, so, fullness of life. This is important advice to any minister of a Christian community, which needs to be fed, as the People of God, and so grow in the right way.

Post-Communion Collect

Merciful Father, you gave your Son Jesus Christ to be the good shepherd, and in his love for us to lay down his life and rise again: keep us always under his protection, and give us grace to follow in his steps; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**