

## Fourth Sunday of Easter

### **First reading:**

*The First Conversions*  
(Acts 2.14, 36-41)

Last Sunday we heard Peter's explanation of the Resurrection as the fulfilment of God's plan as outlined in the scriptures. Now we hear the practical consequences: baptism to wash away sin and to receive the Spirit as Christ did at his own baptism.

From the very beginning Luke shows that baptism and the promises are for all, not just for the Jews. All are welcome into Christ's company. But we must first understand what Peter (and before him Jesus and even John the Baptist) meant by 'repentance'. It is not a doleful moping over sin. It is a change of life, a complete change of scales of values. The Greek word means a changed mindset. The corresponding Hebrew word means 'turning round and going in the opposite direction'. It is a serious business, not to be undertaken lightly. We think we did it at baptism, or when we took on Christianity for ourselves. In fact, a more careful scrutiny tells us of all kinds of unswept corners where the old standards and scales of value remain lurking, breeding and reproducing. The Christian is baptized into Christ and into Christ's death in order to rise to new life with Christ, but even St Paul acknowledges that he remains caught up in doing the evil he wants to avoid.

### **Question:**

*Is it possible to take on Christ's life and yet to sin?*

### **Second reading:**

*The Example of Christ*  
(1 Peter 2.20-25)

The most striking element in this passage is that it is addressed primarily to slaves, exhorting them to bear with the harsh treatment of their masters after the model of Jesus' own acceptance of harsh treatment.

What is striking is that the author does not in the least question the institution of slavery or see injustice in the harsh treatment that slaves tended to receive. It was not for a millennium and a half that the treatment and the institution itself of slavery was seen to be incompatible with Christ's teaching on the equal dignity and limitless value of every individual human being. As Pope Benedict XVI pointed out on his visit to Britain in 2010, credit for the extension to slaves of this important principle of social justice must be given to Christian political movements in Britain.

However, the wider principle remains, that we all suffer to a greater or lesser degree, and that this is a priceless opportunity to draw close to the suffering Christ, and consciously to share in his redemptive suffering. Neither must the suffering of others in union with Christ be neglected. It is easy to despise the poorer and more neglected members of society, and to forget that, by their very disadvantages, they can be the chosen favourites of the Lord.

### **Question:**

*In practice, does slavery still exist in the modern world?*

**Gospel:**

*The Good Shepherd*

*(John 10.1-10)*

In each year of the three-year cycle of readings this Sunday is designated Good Shepherd Sunday, with readings from the parable given in John 10. In the first two Sundays after Easter the meetings with the Risen Lord are described, but after that the most important truth about the Risen Lord which the Church puts before us is that Christ is the Good Shepherd.

In the Old Testament, God is the Shepherd of Israel, and indeed in the neighbouring pastoral nations, too, the protective deity of the nation is commonly called their shepherd. As the pastoral ancient world well knew, the duty of the shepherd is to care devotedly for the sheep, with no regard to the personal cost to himself. Ezekiel repeatedly castigates the recent shepherds of Israel for their failure to care for the sheep and for managing the flock for their own personal advantage.

It is especially striking that in all four gospels the divine title of Shepherd is transferred from God to Jesus himself, at least implying not only that Jesus is the perfect shepherd, but also that he is the incarnation of that divine Shepherd, fulfilling the duties which had hitherto been credited to God alone. By his selfless generosity he is the model for all rulers and leaders of nations.

**Question:**

*Are you a sheep?*

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