

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

Fourth Sunday of Easter

First reading:

*The Healing Power of Jesus
(Acts 4.8-12)*

The Acts of the Apostles shows that the Church carries on the life of Jesus. Under the leadership and power of the Spirit it represents the Risen Christ in the world of the first century and of today.

So Peter and Paul work the same sorts of miracles as Jesus as signs and works of power. They heal people, raise the dead, forgive sins and spread the Good News of the sovereignty of God, just as Jesus did.

In less spectacular ways also the life of the community still continues the work of Jesus. Peter explains that all this is done 'in the name of Jesus'. The name signifies the power of a person.

So we are baptized in, or even into, the name of Jesus, and in this way take on his personality and his power in the Spirit. We become the company of Jesus. It is in his name or power that we hope. In the early years of the Church Christians were known as those over whom the name of Jesus had been pronounced, that is, those who have entered under Jesus' patronage and who trust in his name.

Question:

In what ways could your local Church carry on the life of Christ more faithfully?

Second reading:

*The Love of God for his Children
(1 John 3.1-2)*

From beginning to end this first letter of John is a meditation on Christian love and its implications.

The innermost motivation of all Christian activity is the awareness that we have been raised to sonship of God and to being co-heirs of God with Jesus. Both women and men have been raised to this sonship, for only sons (not daughters) could inherit. This sonship enables us to call God 'Father'. When Paul speaks of this, he uses the Aramaic word 'Abba' as a sort of talisman and guarantee that we can pray 'Father', using the same address as Jesus himself used. 'Abba' is not a children's word like 'Daddy', as has sometimes been supposed, but is the expression of a warm and responsible adult relationship.

Just as Jesus' sonship of the Father consisted in doing perfectly the Father's will, and being about the Father's business in his whole life, so the Christian, spurred on by this relationship, is drawn to a heartfelt obedience. This must be a challenge to us: is the mainspring of our activity to act as sons of the Father, being truly his representatives in the world and striving to bring his will to completion in all that we do?

Question:

Does the scripture help to show us what is meant by being 'sons of God'?

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Gospel

(John 10.11-18)

The Good Shepherd

Each year on this Sunday there is a reading from John about the Good Shepherd. To think of ourselves as woolly and cuddly sheep, obedient to the shepherd, would be a mistake. Sheep are renowned as being silly, contradictory creatures, always starting off in the wrong direction, getting themselves into tangles and difficulties.

In the Holy Land, they are scraggy beasts, pastured on rocky, often dangerous ground, amid boulders and rocky cliffs, threatened by wild animals and marauders. It was not simply a matter of the shepherd sitting on a rock and idly playing his pipe. He needed to be on the alert to save the sheep from hurting themselves.

So Jesus as the good shepherd is kept well occupied by our foibles, our stubbornness, our mistakes and our fears. Again, as in the other two readings, there is the reassurance of a close relationship with the Father. Jesus knows us intimately, just as he knows the Father. It is questionable whether in real life a shepherd should lay down his life for his sheep: what would happen to the remainder of the flock? But it is an expression of his whole-hearted devotion to the sheep, and an assimilation to the case of Jesus.

Question:

In what way are you a sheep?
