

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, May 11th 2014

There are multiple themes that run through today's readings: the appeal of God's word; God's marvelous care for us; the work of the Holy Spirit inspiring conversion. I was especially moved by the twin notions of challenge and comfort, prominent in Peter's speech in the Acts of the Apostles and the analogy of the "good shepherd" from John's gospel.

The reading from Acts continues the speech begun in last week's liturgy as Peter preaches to the "house of Israel." His speech represents the core of the gospel and the disciples' newfound faith in the Risen Jesus. Peter's words are a dense expression of the entire gospel. He boldly challenges his hearers to admit that they had totally missed the message contained in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and to open themselves to faith in the Christ.

Peter reveals to them who Jesus is and how they disregarded his intentions for them: "God made (him) both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." He speaks stinging words in calling his audience to repent and be baptized in Jesus' name. This hard-core challenge produced three thousand persons to repentance and faith in Jesus that day. (Thus is fulfilled Jesus' earlier promise to the disciples, "I will make you fishers of people," – what abundance!)

Ultimately we are the beneficiaries of Peter's exciting and challenging words. God's word will be equally astonishing for the entire world: the promise reflected in Jesus' ministry and life coupled with the work of the Holy Spirit was effective for those in front of Peter that day in Jerusalem and "to all those far off." We are some of those (far off) and thus invited to ongoing repentance based in our baptism.

The "amen, amen I say to you" at the beginning of the gospel passage alerts us to the importance of what follows. This introductory clause is like a bold headline by which Jesus says something like, "Don't miss what follows." So let our ears perk up to hear and capture for ourselves the truth surrounding the care and nourishment brought by the good shepherd.

The sheep have come to know and to trust in the shepherd. They recognize his voice and none other as he calls them to move forward towards more abundant food and water. That same trust and comfort is ours as we listen attentively to the voice of Jesus in our every day lives. How blessed we to be challenged and comforted by the word of God. Peter's challenge and the allegory of the shepherd representing Jesus who knows us so very well truly are an Easter message. We recognize him and are recognized by the voice of Jesus who speaks a comforting message of love that challenges us to live

out the Easter life within us – a life that beckons us to an ever deeper commitment to God and his Son Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

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