

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, May 12th 2014

St. Nereus and St. Achilleus and St. Pancras—all three are Roman martyrs who are remembered today. Nereus and Achilleus were brothers who appear to have done many things together. First they were Roman soldiers, heavily involved in the persecution of Christians; next they received a mysterious prompting to become followers of Christ. They then threw down their weapons, escaped from the army and eventually were martyred, though it is not known how or for sure when, but somewhere in the second or third century.

St. Pancras, on the other hand, is thought to have been a Syrian orphan brought to Rome by his uncle where he and his uncle were converted to Christianity and he became a strong and loud advocate of Christianity. At the age of 14, Pancras was beheaded during the persecutions of Diocletian. He had been given a chance to recant his belief in Christ, but refused.

The opportunity to reflect on little-known martyrs for Christ is one of the gifts of this day.

Another opportunity, as a Gentile, is to ponder the argument of Peter and other Christians in the First Reading about whether or not Gentiles should be accepted into the new church without circumcision. Peter recounts a vision in which he was led to the word from God in a dream; “John had been baptized with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” When the others heard this, they stopped objecting, saying, “God has then granted life-giving repentance to the Gentiles, too.”

It would be naïve to think that this put an end to the vying for first place among the “brothers,” that from this point all experienced an equality of acceptance into the group. In my own life and maybe in yours, from time to time erupts the temptation to judge others as too new, too old, too liberal or too conservative to fit comfortably within the boundaries that I have drawn for my group. Luckily, about the same time, along comes a person who shatters the stereotype and nudges in.

The Gospel is one of my favorites: the good shepherd and the hired hand. How fortunate we are to rest in the belief that Jesus is indeed our “good” shepherd who would, who did lay down his life for each of us. Yet there is a part of this story that Jesus tells that I often neglect.

Our good shepherd is charged with the mission of including us all with a final goal that there will be one flock, one shepherd. Where does that place me in my desire to be special, inside, and a keeper of the gate who gets to choose who is worthy to come in and who is not? On my good days, that places me on my knees.

Maryanne Rouse