

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

LECTIONARY #49

READING I Acts of the Apostles 2:14a, 36–41

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven,
raised his voice, and proclaimed:
“Let the whole house of Israel know for certain
that God has made both Lord and Christ,
this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart,
and they asked Peter and the other apostles,
“What are we to do, my brothers?”

Peter said to them,
“Repent and be baptized, every one of you,
in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins;
and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

For the promise is made to you and to your children
and to all those far off,
whomever the Lord our God will call.”

He testified with many other arguments, and was exhorting them,
“Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”

Those who accepted his message were baptized,
and about three thousand persons were added that day.

There is an urgent tone to this reading, with the sense especially of getting busy to fulfill the work of the Lord.

This statement expresses Peter’s focus: repentance and baptism.

Slight pause between “those” and “far.”

There’s an emphasis here on the numbers, suggesting a sense of the apostles’ initial success.

READING I Peter’s speech takes place in the context of the Jewish feast of Pentecost. Acts reports that “devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem” (2:5) had assembled to celebrate this agricultural feast of the firstfruits. In order to underscore the fact that Peter’s speech is in complete continuity with historic roots in Judaism, Acts notes that the eleven apostles were with Peter, thereby fully representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Peter addresses “the whole house of Israel,” upon whom he places the guilt of Jesus’

crucifixion. In the context of this speech, Peter uses this accusation to point to the sovereignty of God and a call to conversion. To underscore the seriousness of the matter, Peter emphasizes that God has transformed this perceived criminal into “both Lord and Christ.”

The reading suggests that the crowd is deeply wounded by Peter’s accusation and questions how they could possibly repent for such a sin. Peter’s solution is baptism. Some in the crowd would surely recall the baptism of John as they heard Peter’s summons to “repent and be baptized.” However,

unlike the baptism of John, this is not a baptism undertaken in preparation for the eschatological future, this is a baptism that imparts the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Peter concludes his exhortation with the assurance that the call to conversion goes out not only to the Jewish community but to the Gentiles (those who are “far off”). Unlike the Jewish understanding of the covenant, in which God carves out a special people destined for salvation, this message is given to whomever God wishes. Thus, God is not limited in whom he can elect for salvation. Acts suggests the far-

For meditation and context:

Peter is urging patience to this letter's recipients; imagine you are offering the same advice to the assembly.

At "When," Peter shifts directly into the lesson he wants to give, about patience in the face of insult.

Even emphasis on "He himself bore."

The reading concludes with the image of Jesus as shepherd, which will reappear immediately in the reading from the Gospel of John. Allow the words "sheep," "shepherd," and "guardian" to resonate.

reaching power of God's call when it reports that around three thousand people believed Peter's message and were baptized.

READING II This reading from this epistle attributed to St. Peter is thought to be part of an early Christian hymn based on the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah (Isaiah 53:4–12) that describes the lot of a "suffering servant" sent by God to heal the world. The author names Christ as this servant, who undergoes suffering without returning any sort of retribution. Christ is depicted here as the perfect model of suf-

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 23:1–3a, 3b–4, 5, 6 (1)

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

or

R. Alleluia.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
In verdant pastures he gives me repose;
beside restful waters he leads me;
he refreshes my soul.

He guides me in right paths
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk in the dark valley
I fear no evil; for you are at my side,
with your rod and your staff
that give me courage.

You spread the table before me
in the sight of my foes;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

Only goodness and kindness follow me
all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
for years to come.

READING II 1 Peter 2:20b–25

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Peter

Beloved:

If you are **patient** when you **suffer** for **doing what is good**,
this is a grace before God.

For to **this** you have been **called**,
because **Christ also suffered** for you,
leaving you an **example** that you should **follow** in his **footsteps**.
He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.

When he was **insulted**, he **returned no insult**;
when he **suffered**, he did not **threaten**;
instead, he handed himself over to the **one** who judges **justly**.
He himself bore our **sins** in his **body** upon the **cross**,
so that, **free from sin**, we might **live for righteousness**.
By his **wounds** you have been **healed**.
For you had **gone astray** like **sheep**,
but you have **now returned** to the **shepherd and guardian**
of your **souls**.

fering. The author's point is to remind Christians that while Christ's suffering was undertaken in their name, they must be willing to patiently endure similar suffering in their present-day reality. The ability to suffer along with Christ is both a grace and something Christians are called to by God.

What are the practical ways in which a Christian must patiently endure suffering? The author provides several answers: commit no sin, speak no words of deception, offer no insult when insulted, and make no threat when threatened. The proper response to all things that will test the

patience of a Christian is to surrender the self just as Christ freely gave himself over to "the one who judges justly." This just judge is his own Father, and thus, suffering is to be seen as an offering of love.

Finally, the reading ends with a call to "live for righteousness," which is made possible because Christians have been healed by Christ's suffering. The suffering servant is now likened to a shepherd who is faithful in watching over his flock. The author accuses his readers of having once wandered from the flock but have now returned to the fold. The Greek word here

GOSPEL John 10:1-10

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

Jesus said:

**"Amen, amen, I say to you,
whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate
but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber.**

But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.
The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice,
as the shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

When he has driven out all his own,
he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him,
because they recognize his voice.

But they will not follow a stranger;
they will run away from him,
because they do not recognize the voice of strangers."

Although Jesus used this figure of speech,
the Pharisees did not realize what he was trying to tell them.

So Jesus said again, "Amen, amen, I say to you,
I am the gate for the sheep.

All who came before me are thieves and robbers,
but the sheep did not listen to them.

I am the gate.

Whoever enters through me will be saved,
and will come in and go out and find pasture.

A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy;
I came so that they might have life and have it
more abundantly."

An allegorical reading from John's Gospel with the potent, forceful quality repeated in its two parts. In the first part, John presents his allegory. In the second part, John explains the allegory. Don't let the repetition trip you up. John is extending his example with his explanation.

Slight pause between "sheep" and "hear."

Slight pause between "out" and "all."

Here begins the explanation of the allegory.

Emphasis on "I."

for "guardian" is *episkopos*, the word used for "bishop." Thus, this early Christian hymn can be understood to be both a profession of belonging both to Christ and to the authority of the Church.

GOSPEL

The beginning of the tenth chapter of John introduces us to the theme of the "Good Shepherd." Here Jesus employs two different shepherding images to illustrate his care for all those who follow him. The first reference to a shepherd emphasizes the legitimacy of his authority. The legitimate shepherd is

the one whose voice is known by the sheep and who in turn knows each of the sheep by name. This shepherd does not lead them astray or take advantage of them by stealing. Instead, this shepherd has a genuine relationship of trust with his sheep. The Pharisees fail to recognize that Jesus is likening them to these false shepherds.

The second image Jesus uses at the outset of the "Good Shepherd" discourse is that of a "gate." He refers to himself as a gate that protects the sheep; it will keep the "thieves and robbers" (the false shepherds) away from the sheep. This reference

also applies to salvation, as those who pass through the gate, namely those who come to believe in Jesus and hear his voice, will have access to the Father. False shepherds seek to destroy the sheep (here we can read "Church"), whereas Jesus is the "Good Shepherd" who wishes to give life in abundance. Jesus is the one reliable "gate" that leads to God, and thus he is the way to true salvation. S.W.