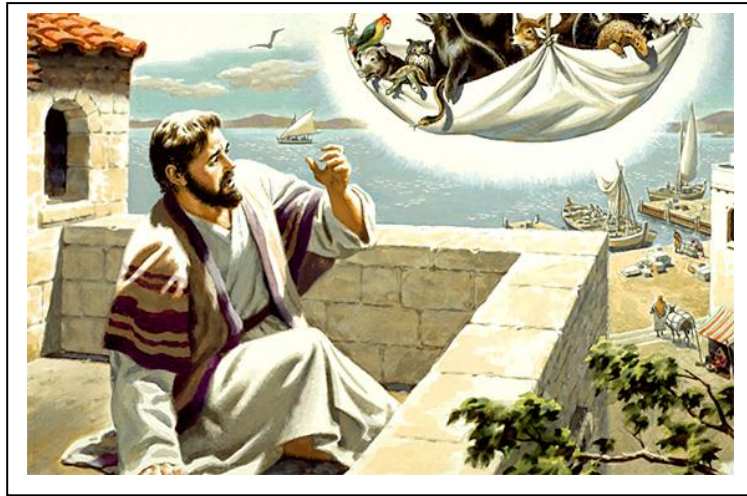


Fourth Week of Easter

Monday 4th May



First reading

Acts 11:1-18

God can grant even the pagans the repentance that leads to life

The apostles and the brothers in Judaea heard that the pagans too had accepted the word of God, and when Peter came up to Jerusalem the Jews criticised him and said, ‘So you have been visiting the uncircumcised and eating with them, have you?’ Peter in reply gave them the details point by point: ‘One day, when I was in the town of Jaffa,’ he began ‘I fell into a trance as I was praying and had a vision of something like a big sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners. This sheet reached the ground quite close to me. I watched it intently and saw all sorts of animals and wild beasts – everything possible that could walk, crawl or fly. Then I heard a voice that said to me, “Now, Peter; kill and eat!” But I answered: Certainly not, Lord; nothing profane or unclean has ever crossed my lips. And a second time the voice spoke from heaven, “What God has made clean, you have no right to call profane.” This was repeated three times, before the whole of it was drawn up to heaven again.

‘Just at that moment, three men stopped outside the house where we were staying; they had been sent from Caesarea to fetch me, and the Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going back with them. The six brothers here came with me as well, and we entered the man’s house. He told us he had seen an angel standing in his house who said, “Send to Jaffa and fetch Simon known as Peter; he has a message for you that will save you and your entire household.”

‘I had scarcely begun to speak when the Holy Spirit came down on them in the same way as it came on us at the beginning, and I remembered that the Lord had said, “John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.” I realised then that God was giving them the identical thing he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ; and who was I to stand in God’s way?’

This account satisfied them, and they gave glory to God. ‘God’ they said ‘can evidently grant even the pagans the repentance that leads to life.’

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 41(42):2-3,42:3-4

Gospel Acclamation

Jn10:14

Alleluia, alleluia!

I am the good shepherd, says the Lord;

I know my own sheep and my own know me.

Alleluia!

The good shepherd is one who lays down his life for his sheep

Jesus said:

‘I am the good shepherd:
 the good shepherd is one who lays down his life for his sheep.
 The hired man, since he is not the shepherd
 and the sheep do not belong to him,
 abandons the sheep and runs away
 as soon as he sees a wolf coming,
 and then the wolf attacks and scatters the sheep;
 this is because he is only a hired man
 and has no concern for the sheep.
 ‘I am the good shepherd;
 I know my own
 and my own know me,
 just as the Father knows me
 and I know the Father;
 and I lay down my life for my sheep.
 And there are other sheep I have
 that are not of this fold,
 and these I have to lead as well.
 They too will listen to my voice,
 and there will be only one flock,
 and one shepherd.
 ‘The Father loves me,
 because I lay down my life
 in order to take it up again.
 No one takes it from me;
 I lay it down of my own free will,
 and as it is in my power to lay it down,
 so it is in my power to take it up again;
 and this is the command I have been given by my Father.’

Fr Tim’s Reflection

During this week, the first readings continue from the Acts of the Apostles, telling the story of how “the followers of the way” changed from being a sect of Judaism into a religion open to all. As we shall see, it was a painful transition.

Luke, the author of the Acts, remembers that it was Peter who first accepted “pagans” (by that he meant people who were not Jews) to be followers of Jesus. He has some explaining to do as some of the other apostles, notably James, was not happy with this. He tells the story of how it was that the Holy Spirit was in charge and he was being led by the spirit.

In Peter’s dream he imagines a blanket being let down from heaven. On the blanket there were all the foods that were not permitted in Judaism. A voice commanded Peter to eat. Being a strict Jew, he refused. It was all to do with ritual purity. Those who ate such foods were considered to be ritually unclean. This accounts for why other nations and religions were looked down upon by those who took these commands seriously. We can thank God, that even in a crisis, we have enough to eat.

Most of the rest of Acts recounts the adventures of Paul, who went to the ends of the earth to preach the good news. It was important for Luke to show that this was not Paul’s invention, but that Peter had been instructed to do this first. We believe that Jesus is the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep – but his sheepfold is the whole world. No one is outside of the possibility of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Fourth Week of Easter

Tuesday 5th May



First reading

Acts 11:19-26

They started preaching to the Greeks, proclaiming the Lord Jesus

Those who had escaped during the persecution that happened because of Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, but they usually proclaimed the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, who came from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch where they started preaching to the Greeks, proclaiming the Good News of the Lord Jesus to them as well. The Lord helped them, and a great number believed and were converted to the Lord.

The church in Jerusalem heard about this and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. There he could see for himself that God had given grace, and this pleased him, and he urged them all to remain faithful to the Lord with heartfelt devotion; for he was a good man, filled with the Holy Spirit and with faith. And a large number of people were won over to the Lord.

Barnabas then left for Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him he brought him to Antioch. As things turned out they were to live together in that church a whole year, instructing a large number of people. It was at Antioch that the disciples were first called 'Christians.'

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 86(87)

Gospel Acclamation

Jn10:27

Alleluia, alleluia!

The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice,

says the Lord,

I know them and they follow me.

Alleluia!

The Father and I are one

It was the time when the feast of Dedication was being celebrated in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the Temple walking up and down in the Portico of Solomon. The Jews gathered round him and said, 'How much longer are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.' Jesus replied:

'I have told you, but you do not believe.

The works I do in my Father's name are my witness;

but you do not believe,

because you are no sheep of mine.

The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice;

I know them and they follow me.

I give them eternal life;

they will never be lost

and no one will ever steal them from me.

The Father who gave them to me is greater than anyone,

and no one can steal from the Father.

The Father and I are one.'

Fr Tim's Reflection

For the first time, the "followers of the way" received the name "Christians" – anointed ones – followers of the anointed Jesus. Despite the fact that Jesus had said at the ascension that his disciples should travel to the ends of the earth to baptise, they chose to remain in Jerusalem and build up the church there. It was only the martyrdom of Stephen, and the persecution that followed, that spurred on the apostles, running for their lives, to take the message with them. The church in Antioch became the first sizable Christian community consisting of Jews and non-Jews, so Barnabas is sent to investigate.

Here one of the most creative apostolic partnerships is formed. Barnabas goes to Tarsus to find Paul, and a formidable partnership is formed. They work together in Antioch for a whole year before setting out on what we now call Paul's first missionary journey, where the pair travel round most of Europe and Asia Minor proclaiming the good news.

In the gospel today we come to the end of the "Good Shepherd" discourse. Jesus is claiming to be the pastor who really cares for us, the sheep that belong to his fold. Jesus observes that the relationship between the shepherd and his sheep is so close that the sheep recognise even the voice of their shepherd and follows him when he calls. They do not respond to the voices of others. They have been trained to follow their master.

The opportunity for more prayer during this lockdown period is so important. In our prayer we can "tune in" to the voice of our master. We can begin to recognise the genuine call of God and filter out many other voices that are not genuine and which do not lead us in the right direction. Once we recognise that, because of Jesus, we belong to the Father, we find the words at the end of the gospel very reassuring: "No one can steal from the Father".

We can use the many occasions where we have to make little decisions to tune into the Father's wavelength. For example, each day I need to decide what to eat, how to use my time, what exercise I should take, who to call on the phone, what to watch on the television. A myriad of little decisions that together shape my day. Each of these micro decisions, enables me to reinforce my big decision – to be a disciple of the Lord. Yes, maybe I do need to watch what I eat, maybe I could be using my time more constructively, yes, even maybe I need to work on my relationship with those I love. In the little things I can be more at home with the fundamental choice I have made: To be a friend and a follower of Jesus – *to be a Christian*.

Fourth Week of Easter

Wednesday 6th May



First reading

Acts 12:24-13:5

'I want Barnabas and Saul set apart'

The word of God continued to spread and to gain followers. Barnabas and Saul completed their task and came back from Jerusalem, bringing John Mark with them.

In the church at Antioch the following were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. One day while they were offering worship to the Lord and keeping a fast, the Holy Spirit said, 'I want Barnabas and Saul set apart for the work to which I have called them.' So it was that after fasting and prayer they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

So these two, sent on their mission by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and from there sailed to Cyprus. They landed at Salamis and proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; John acted as their assistant.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 66(67):2-3,5-6,8

Gospel Acclamation

Jn20:29

Alleluia, alleluia!

‘You believe, Thomas, because you can see me.

Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.

Alleluia!

Gospel

John 12:44-50

I, the light, have come into the world

Jesus declared publicly:

‘Whoever believes in me

believes not in me

but in the one who sent me,

and whoever sees me,

sees the one who sent me.

I, the light, have come into the world,

so that whoever believes in me

need not stay in the dark any more.

If anyone hears my words and does not keep them faithfully,

it is not I who shall condemn him,

since I have come not to condemn the world,

but to save the world.

He who rejects me and refuses my words has his judge already:

the word itself that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day.

For what I have spoken does not come from myself;

no, what I was to say,

what I had to speak,

was commanded by the Father who sent me,

and I know that his commands mean eternal life.

And therefore what the Father has told me

is what I speak.’

Fr Tim’s Reflection

The *John Mark* in the first reading today, we believe, is the Mark who is the author of the gospel that bears his name. He is set apart, along with Paul and Barnabas, and commissioned by the mother church in Jerusalem, to take the message to the ends of the earth. Acts is clear – the elders in Jerusalem deliberately decided to send these men, and they showed that this was their deliberate choice by fasting, praying and the laying on of hands. Later, some would claim that Paul invented a gospel of his own, different from the gospel of Jesus. But Acts is clear – these men were sent out by the church in Jerusalem to preach with their authority.

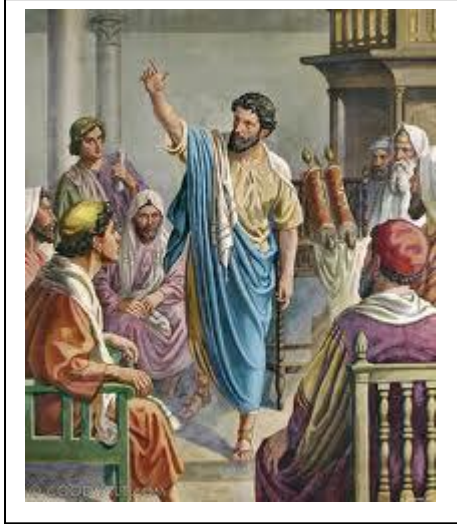
The gospel today contains a phrase of Jesus that has inspired many. Holbein, tried to capture these words in his painting: “The Light of the World”. Drawing on the book of the Apocalypse (or Revelation – also by John). Holbein depicts Jesus with a lamp, knocking at a door, seeking admittance so that he can sit and eat with the occupant of the house. If Jesus is admitted he will bring his light with him.

This is a wonderful metaphor for our Christian development. We need Jesus, the light of the world, to knock at our door, to enter into our house, to become part of our lives, so that we can share, not just our table with him, but the whole of who we are.

Notice how Jesus uses his light – it is not to show up what is bad in our lives, but to illuminate what is good. Jesus has no need to judge or condemn us, we do that for ourselves when we choose not to make use of his light. Let us pray that today we will have the courage to open the door, welcome Jesus and share all we have with him.

Fourth Week of Easter

Thursday 7th May



First reading

Acts 13:13-25

God has raised up one of David's descendants, Jesus, as Saviour

Paul and his friends went by sea from Paphos to Perga in Pamphylia where John left them to go back to Jerusalem. The others carried on from Perga till they reached Antioch in Pisidia. Here they went to synagogue on the Sabbath and took their seats. After the lessons from the Law and the Prophets had been read, the presidents of the synagogue sent them a message: 'Brothers, if you would like to address some words of encouragement to the congregation, please do so.' Paul stood up, held up a hand for silence and began to speak:

'Men of Israel, and fearers of God, listen! The God of our nation Israel chose our ancestors, and made our people great when they were living as foreigners in Egypt; then by divine power he led them out, and for about forty years took care of them in the wilderness. When he had destroyed seven nations in Canaan, he put them in possession of their land for about four hundred and fifty years. After this he gave them judges, down to the prophet Samuel. Then they demanded a king, and God gave them Saul son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin. After forty years, he deposed him and made David their king, of whom he approved in these words, "I have selected David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, who will carry out my whole purpose." To keep his promise, God has raised up for Israel one of David's descendants, Jesus, as Saviour, whose coming was heralded by John when he proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the whole people of Israel. Before John ended his career he said, "I am not the one you imagine me to be; that one is coming after me and I am not fit to undo his sandal.'"

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 88(89):2-3,21,22,25,27

Gospel Acclamation

cf. Rv1:5

Alleluia, alleluia!

You, O Christ, are the faithful witness,
the First-born from the dead,

you have loved us and have washed away our sins with your blood.

Alleluia!

Whoever welcomes the one I send welcomes me

After he had washed the feet of his disciples, Jesus said to them:

‘I tell you most solemnly,
no servant is greater than his master,
no messenger is greater than the man who sent him.

‘Now that you know this, happiness will be yours if you behave accordingly. I am not speaking about all of you: I know the ones I have chosen; but what scripture says must be fulfilled: *Someone who shares my table rebels against me.*

‘I tell you this now, before it happens,
so that when it does happen
you may believe that I am He.

I tell you most solemnly,
whoever welcomes the one I send welcomes me,
and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.’

Fr Tim’s reflection

In the gospel today and for much of the rest of the Easter season we read from the “Last Supper” discourse of John. He spends four whole chapters recording the last instructions of Jesus to his disciples. The scene is set: the disciples have assembled in the upper room, Jesus has washed their feet. Now he sets about the task of instructing them. Jesus never claims authority in his own right. The one who accepts him and welcomes him, accepts and welcomes the Father, the one who sent him

In the first reading, Saul has finally become Paul (a Jewish name is transformed into a Roman one) and, with the help of Barnabas, embarks on the task he was sent to do – evangelisation. Wherever he went, he would always begin with the synagogue. His first audience was the Jews in exile. It was only when they rejected his invitation to believe in Jesus, that he would turn his attention to those who were not Jews.

So in today’s reading, Paul is trying to situate his experience of Jesus in the bigger picture of the history of the Jewish faith. He begins with the settlement of the promised land after their escape from Egypt. He talks about the time of the Judges and king Saul, anointed by the prophet Samuel. Finally he reaches King David, the hero of the Old Testament. Jesus is the worthy “Son of David”, not simply born of his royal line, but one who exhibits the same traits that made David the most outstanding King in their history.

Notice the methodology Paul uses in his evangelisation. He begins with where his hearers are, with what is familiar to them. Then gently he leads them to where they need to be – recipients of God’s revelation – ones in need of God’s salvation.

Hopefully today there will be some good news for us about the current lockdown. We are eagerly awaiting a relaxation of some of the restrictions under which we have been living for the last six weeks. Of course, some of us will have to continue to self-isolate for some time to come. However, as the process of gradually returning to normal begins, we can both look back and look forward.

We can look back at our experience of the last six weeks: What have we learnt? How are we now stronger than we were at the beginning? How has our relationship with God deepened over this time. It is good to spend a moment reflecting on these questions. But going forward, we can ask ourselves how we can incorporate what we have learnt into the experience of life as it returns to normal.

We have all changed. Let’s give thanks for the journey and pray that we will continue our journey with our trusted travelling companion and friend.

Fourth Week of Easter

Friday 8th May

75th Anniversary of VE Day



First reading

Acts 13:26-33

God has fulfilled his promise by raising Jesus from the dead

Paul stood up in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia, held up a hand for silence and began to speak:

‘My brothers, sons of Abraham’s race, and all you who fear God, this message of salvation is meant for you. What the people of Jerusalem and their rulers did, though they did not realise it, was in fact to fulfil the prophecies read on every Sabbath. Though they found nothing to justify his death, they condemned him and asked Pilate to have him executed. When they had carried out everything that scripture foretells about him they took him down from the tree and buried him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he appeared to those who had accompanied him from Galilee to Jerusalem: and it is these same companions of his who are now his witnesses before our people.

‘We have come here to tell you the Good News. It was to our ancestors that God made the promise but it is to us, their children, that he has fulfilled it, by raising Jesus from the dead. As scripture says in the second psalm: *You are my son: today I have become your father.*’

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 2:6-11

Gospel Acclamation

Col3:1

Alleluia, alleluia!

Since you have been brought back to true life with Christ, you must look for the things that are in heaven, where Christ is, sitting at God’s right hand.

Alleluia!

I am the Way, the Truth and the Life

Jesus said to his disciples:

‘Do not let your hearts be troubled.

Trust in God still, and trust in me.

There are many rooms in my Father’s house;

if there were not, I should have told you.

I am going now to prepare a place for you,

and after I have gone and prepared you a place,

I shall return to take you with me;

so that where I am

you may be too.

You know the way to the place where I am going.’

Thomas said, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?’ Jesus said:

‘I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.

No one can come to the Father except through me.’

Fr Tim’s Reflection

Today is VE Day, where we remember with joy the declaration of peace in Europe after the ravages of the Second World War. Under normal circumstances, this would be a day of national celebration. We would come together and party as did our forefathers in 1945, who spontaneously celebrated in the streets the end of the rigours of the war. Alas, today we cannot party in public in the same way, but that should not stop us from celebrating interiorly the important milestone of 8th May 1945.

Hopefully, we are today coming to the end of another war – the war against Covid-19. In this war there has been much self-sacrifice, there has been some casualties on the way, and there will be, for some time to come, economic hardship as a consequence of the battle finally won.

We can relate our experience of today using the prism of the daily readings. Paul courageously proclaims the message of the resurrection of Jesus to his fellow Jews in Antioch. Believing that Jesus really died, but then rose from the dead, changes everything. No matter what life throws at us, we have the faith to believe that good will conquer bad, that life will destroy death, that hope will always prevail.

As we recall the events of VE day in 1945, we can be thankful that our world has not been plunged into war again since then. The outbreak of peace has survived for 75 years. Hopefully, we can be similarly thankful, once our battle with Covid-19 is won, that we will not have to enjoin in a similar battle for many years to come.

My parents lived through the second world war. It’s not an experience I was able to share with them. However, by growing up with them, I was able to see how their lives had been marked by their experience. My parents did not speak much about their war years, but they wanted make sure that we, their children, would never have to go through what they experienced. I am grateful to them for this.

We can imagine what stories we might be telling the generations not yet born. Maybe we will not speak much of our Covid-19 lockdown experience, but we will want the next generation to be able to share a world where such an experience is not repeated. We can pray today for the researchers who are hard at work trying to find a permanent solution making sure that this recent history never repeats itself.

If you can, celebrate today and give thanks to God.