

#### **Fourth Sunday of Easter (4/29/07)**

We continue to read of the spread of the faith in Jesus by the early church, as well as the dual response to the gospel message, acceptance or rejection (including apathy). People of humble heart can hear God speak to them, people with hardened or inattentive hearts choose not to hear. Or to put it another way, there are those who choose to be led by Jesus the Good Shepherd and those who choose to lead themselves.

Why would someone choose not to hear the voice of Jesus or not follow it? Lots of reasons of course but fundamentally it is the choice to be a follower or a leader. Many people today, Catholics included, find it difficult to hear the voice of Jesus through the teaching authority of the Church. Satan is responsible for that of course but people don't have to listen to Satan. But Satan appeals to our desire to have more control in our lives. As mentioned last week, Satan always packages evil in a very pretty box.

If we submit ourselves to God, it follows that we love every human life that Jesus died for, as well as the process itself of human creation, sex between a husband and wife. For example, control over one's "reproductive life" is packaged nicely to women, but ultimately a woman has to choose to respect her body and be in harmony with all of creation, or to see her body as something that can betray her and needs to be controlled. In a very nice way Satan is asking women and the men who support their "reproductive freedom" to sell their souls for more control of their bodies and their lives. I am so concerned about this because in the process over 40 million innocent American lives have been killed. This is a much greater moral evil than war or hunger.

Jesus the Good Shepherd invites us to follow him and to submit ourselves to God's plan for each of us as well as for humanity as a whole. That means submitting ourselves to learn how to love as Christ defines Love, not as the secular world defines it. The Shepherd instructs his shepherds in the Church to help us on our pilgrimage through life, and we in turn are asked to be shepherds of our own lives wherever we find ourselves, as parents for example. All good parents hear the Shepherd's voice through his Church and follow, while also leading and teaching their children. Thus we all help each other through the Church to follow Christ! Alleluia!

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### **Third Sunday of Easter (4/22/07)**

Happy Easter season! It's good to really celebrate the joy of this season thinking about the victory of Jesus over death and sin and our participation in that victory. There will be many times in our life when we don't feel particularly victorious, but that happens frequently during the spiritual battles of our life. The superlative good news is that the victory is already won; we just need to have faith during our participation in the daily battle between good and evil.

The reading from the Acts of the Apostles shows us that they too had to face persecution for their faith. That is one reason why we read these stories during the Easter season, to remind us that our ancestors in faith also struggled during their daily lives to live the gospel, and that they persevered in remaining faithful as a model for us.

In these Easter readings we see the prominent role Peter played in the early church. Last Sunday's reading had the sick people cured even by the shadow of Peter walking past. In the gospel today Peter receives his final commission from Jesus in a trifold manner to offset his triple denial of Jesus. We see the great trust Jesus had in Peter, even with all of his weaknesses. Jesus has the same trust in us. Though we are not all called to be "Peter" for the Church, we are called to remain faithful to Jesus' teaching and be good role models to strengthen each other. When we do this we truly "feed" one another with the grace that comes from our risen Lord Jesus. Amen!

## **Divine Mercy Sunday (4/15/07)**

The Octave of Easter, during which each day is celebrated as Easter Sunday, concludes with the Second Sunday of Easter, called Divine Mercy Sunday. Divine Mercy Sunday recalls the infinite mercy of Jesus, earned through His passion, death and resurrection, ready to be poured out for the forgiveness of our sins. All it takes is the asking, or more accurately, the proper asking. Jesus' infinite mercy is available for anyone who asks with even the smallest intention of repenting for their sins and changing their life to try to avoid sin. All we have to do is crack our hard hearts just a little bit and Jesus is waiting to jump in.

The mistake some people can make is to ask for forgiveness because they are sorry, in a general way, for the harm their sins may have caused, but they have no real intention of changing their lives. This is dangerous because one of the conditions of repentance and forgiveness is a firm intention to "amend our lives". A firm intention comes from analyzing the patterns of why and how we sin and then taking active steps to try to change those patterns with God's grace.

Divine Mercy Sunday is celebrated by praying the Chaplet of Divine Mercy on our Rosary beads. In the Chaplet we pray for God's mercy "on us and on the whole world". This is a very powerful prayer. Pamphlets are available in the back of church to help you pray this, preferably with your family. Can you imagine how pleased our Lord is with this act of charity on our part? May God bless us in our ministry of praying for each other and the whole world, and may we experience the depth of Jesus' mercy and love in our own hearts. Happy Easter!

### **Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion (4/1/07)**

Palm branches were used as a type of flag or banner to welcome important visitors in the Middle East in Jesus' time. Jesus accepted the adulation calmly, probably reluctantly, because He knew the human heart so well. One minute the crowds are hailing Him as hero, and a few days later they call for His crucifixion. Even His own disciples would desert Him. "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak".

We enter into the events of Holy Week and are invited to reflect on those events and our response. Would we have been in the crowd cheering or busy elsewhere? Would we be willing to turn our back on Jesus (today, it would be His teaching) because we are afraid to defend Him (His teaching)? Would we run away when the soldiers came to arrest Him? Would we approach the cross or stay at a distance for fear of being recognized as His follower?

Holy Week is a wonderful opportunity for us to enter into the events of so long ago so we can grow deeper in our faith. The Triduum (Holy Thursday through Easter) are the holiest days of the year for Catholics. Let us enter into the mystery not knowing what will happen in our spiritual life but leaving it in God's hands as we surrender to His will for us this Holy Week. May God draw us through the cross to the joy of Easter!