

26th April 2026. 4th Sunday of Easter.

Prayer for today: Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life: raise us, who trust in him, from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, that we may seek the things that are above, where he reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Among those who are sick we pray for Rosemary Belshaw, Will Sadler, Leo Pyle, John Gibson, Brenda Clark, Elizabeth Wood, Nigel Baty-Symes, Andrew McKendrick, Kate Marris, Maureen Stevens, Prue and Nancy, Ned Ryan, Daniel Bosman, Suzie Dent, Nick Cook, Christina Baldwin, Lorraine Dodd, Kathleen Lee, Carol McKendrick, Stuart Bell, Maggie Bennett, Elizabeth Sambell, and Heather Loughhead.

Amongst those whose year's mind is about this time we remember Elizabeth Johnson, Andrzej Ciupska, Thelma Kirker-Head and Jonathan David Brownlee.

In our prayers of intercession the response to the petition 'In faith we pray' is 'Meet us in the silence.'

Readings:

Acts 2: 42-47

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in

common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Psalm 23

The Lord *is* my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³ He restoreth my soul:

he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me;
thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:
thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

John 10:1-10

'Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of

them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognise a stranger's voice.' ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, 'Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.'

Thoughts on today's readings

Pope Leo XIV has recently completed a journey to a number of African nations. It is not a journey which has made the headlines in our own country; he has been travelling to countries where life is marked by violence, injustice and poverty. In these last days he spoke out against some of those who are amongst the most powerful men in the world today, notably those who choose to justify their horrifying actions by claiming to have God on their side. He described them as 'Masters of war' whose hands are so 'full of blood' that God does not hear their prayers. He speaks of a world 'ravaged by a handful of tyrants.' Woe to those, he says, who drag 'that which is sacred into darkness and filth.'

It can seem as though leadership has been entrusted to men characterised by selfishness and boundless corruption, promoting selfishness and limitless greed, contempt for the poor and the vulnerable, lying shamelessly, throwing blame at foreigners, and commissioning violence without any sense of accountability. They

are happy to use the name of god, but truly their only god is money. Their actions are reported to us every day: we cannot say we were not warned, we did not know.

The world into which Jesus was not so very different: the Temple of Herod in Jerusalem was in part about a violent tyrant buying the approval of the religious establishment. Jesus reserved special criticism for those religious leaders: their love of being respected, their hypocrisy and hardness of heart. At the head of the greatest empire the world had ever seen was a man who had trampled on the bodies of many of his own relatives to grasp the crown, who had statues of himself erected wherever possible, and demanded to be worshipped as a god.

It is all a long way from the Good Samaritan, but today we are given the words of Jesus, Son of God, our living Lord, about what true leadership looks like from God's perspective. He is the shepherd who knows his flock by name: they are not data, not numbers. And they know his voice. They can trust him because he walks ahead of them: he is the gate: that which can protect, and that which opens; he is the way. When they are in the sheepfold there is protection; when they go out into the world they are not alone: he goes ahead of them, and will lead them to pasture and to water for life. For he is come that those who follow him may have life: life in all its fulness.

This Lord is humble: he does not enter his city beneath a golden arch but on a borrowed donkey. His service to his Father and to his flock is fulfilled on a cross and in death. He is buried in a grave provided by a stranger.

Why then do we follow him? Because he alone has the words of life, and not everyone has been blinded by the gleam of gold and not

everyone has been cowed or convinced by power and lethal force. Because we were made in the image of God: we are capable of love, beauty and goodness as well as violence, selfishness and sin. Because Jesus is not in that tomb, but alive and among us, ahead of us, and in the lives of his flock.

That is the message of our first reading today: the impact of the Holy Spirit of the living God in the lives of those who had followed Jesus to Jerusalem. These verses list the signs of that living presence in the lives they lived together:

They trusted in his teaching, passed on by his apostles, and in his name did great signs and wonders.

Their life together was one of fellowship: this was not about the sanctity of private property – they shared all that they had.

They followed the teaching of Jesus in the breaking of the bread, a celebration of the living power of that sacrifice by which he had defeated the power of sin and death.

They were faithful in taking everything to God in prayer, praising God in his Temple in gratitude and joy.

Carole was reporting to me conversations she had recently with friends. They shared stories of the extraordinary kindness and generosity of strangers who helped them in difficulties, here in England. My own life has been marked, and lessons for life learned, from similar experiences both here and across the world. My children on their travels have met such strangers who were angels in their times of need. Let us never grow weary of taking the opportunities which are presented to us to be the love of Christ, and the light of Christ, in the life of a neighbour. Let us not underestimate that power which is ours, and know it is always better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.