

May 3, 2020: Fourth Sunday of Easter: Year A
First Reading: Acts 2.14a, 36b-41
Responsorial Psalm: Ps 23.1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6 (R. 1)
Second Reading: 1 Peter 2.20b-25
Gospel: John 10.1-10

Homily by Fr. Robert Weaver

“Thank you, thank you very much.” The famous and talented singer Elvis Presley was known for saying these words to the audience after singing a song. And let’s face it, saying “thank you” goes a “long way” in bringing about closeness between people. But **giving thanks** goes deeper than this, for an important dimension of our relationship with God is the **need to thank him** for all the gifts he gives us.

This need to **thank God** is found in the feast of Pentecost, which is mentioned in today’s 1st reading – taken from the Act of Apostles. As we hear, “[w]hen the day of Pentecost had come, Peter...raised his voice and addressed the crowd.” I will get into some of what Peter said a bit later on, but right now I would like to talk about Pentecost.

The word “Pentecost” comes from the Greek word *pentecostes* which means “fiftieth.” As Catholics, Pentecost is a magnificent feast for us as we rejoice over the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Mary and the Apostles that occurred 50 days after Jesus rose from the dead. Interestingly enough, the origins of Pentecost are found within the Jewish tradition (see: <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/everything-you-need-to-know-about-pentecost-78932>).

The Jewish feast of Pentecost was a celebration held 50 days after the Jewish Passover feast. It was also called the “Feast of Weeks” and it was a **day of thanksgiving** for the harvest, as Jews from different parts of Israel would come to Jerusalem with the first loaves of bread from their spring wheat crop and offer these loaves to the Lord. In time, God’s covenants with Noah and Moses were also celebrated within the

Pentecost feast (see: : <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2018-05/gospel-commentary-20-may-2018.html>; Ignatius Catholic Study Bible, 209).

So, it was on this great day of **thanksgiving** – the Jewish Pentecost in Jerusalem, that we hear Peter preaching at today. And we are told that his listeners were “cut to the heart”; they were clearly moved by his preaching, and so they asked Peter and the Apostles what they should do next, as they had come to realize that Jesus Christ had truly risen from the dead!

Well, Peter “laid out” what they should do very clearly. He said: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you...so that your sins may be forgiven and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away...”

There is definitely a lot going on in this passage. For one, Peter makes it clear that Baptism is a grace-filled sacrament. The very act of Baptism involves an outpouring of the Holy Spirit which forgives sins. Also, when Peter says this “promise is for you, [and] for your children” he is saying that Baptism is for people of all ages. Some of our non-Catholic brothers and sisters think Baptism should be restricted to those who have reached the age of reason and that infants should not be baptized. But Peter is saying nothing of the sort here, and this passage helps to lay the foundation for the Catholic practice of infant Baptism (see Pitre, MRE, 7-8).

When we consider our need to **thank God for all of his gifts**, it is crucial that we include his **gift of Baptism**. When a person is baptized, it doesn't matter if he or she is 1 or 101, that person is changed for eternity. Baptism consecrates a person to God, and makes one an adopted son or daughter of God.

What's more, Baptism establishes a bond of fellowship within the community of believers and this is so important for us, for our journey toward eternal salvation is not a private journey with God but one that

we carry out with other disciples, as we are blessed with their help and companionship

(see: <https://thecatholicspirit.com/faith/focus-on-faith/faith-fundamentals/spiritual-effects-benefits-baptism/>).

In our second reading today St. Peter reminds us that the Lord is “the shepherd and guardian of...[our souls]”. And as our Good Shepherd, the Lord often sends other disciples our way to help shepherd or guide us during our earthly pilgrimages. When I think of spiritual shepherds or guides in my life, my parents Alex and Connie Weaver certainly come to mind. From their teaching me to say prayers before meals and bedtime as well as ensuring that I received different sacraments they were always there to help deepen my relationship with God.

God has sent other shepherds into my life as well, and one of them is a priest that I will refer to as Fr. Jones. This was not his real name but that is the name I will use for him today.

I knew Fr. Jones when I was growing up in the small town of Summerland, BC, as he would visit my home parish and celebrate Mass there on occasion. Fr. Jones belonged to a religious order and he began his priesthood as a missionary to Native people living in the central interior region of BC. He took on different roles throughout his life. For instance, he gave dynamic parish missions and retreats and he also served as a parish priest in various places.

I was once told that at one point in his life Fr. Jones experienced a great tragedy, as he and another priest were on a hunting trip and Fr. Jones accidentally shot and killed this other priest. This likely upset Fr. Jones very much, and to make up for this tragic loss he promised “to do the work of two priests.”

My fond memories of Fr. Jones strongly suggest that he kept this promise. He was always full of energy, passion, and joy and I felt good just being around him. When I saw him, there was a sense in me that everything was going to be alright. Fr. Jones did not retire until he was

92 years old and then he died only a few months later. So, I think it is safe to assume that Fr. Jones ended up doing the work of two priests.

I don't recall ever thinking that "someday I want to be like Fr. Jones" or anything like that, but I believe that my getting to know this shepherd planted a seed in my mind that being a priest is a joyful and happy life – and indeed it is!

I thank God for calling me to the priesthood and now I cannot imagine doing anything else but priestly ministry. Priesthood is truly an awesome vocation. And through our baptism, God calls each one of us to an awesome vocation. Most are called to marriage, and yet others are called to the single life, or to priesthood, or to the religious life, or to the diaconate, or to consecrated virginity. God blesses each one of us with wonderful gifts, and we are all called to a vocation to use these gifts for the glory of God (see: <https://stmonica.net/sacraments/vocations>).

So, as we meet today on this 4th Sunday of Easter - sometimes called Good Shepherd Sunday, let us express our gratitude to God for all those shepherds He sends us throughout our lives that help us live out our vocation. And in doing so, we are reminded that we are called to shepherd others as well. A big task, for sure, but God always provides the grace and help we need.

As Jesus the Good Shepherd says today, he came so that we may have life and have it abundantly. Indeed, all life, including eternal life, is found in Our Lord, and for this let us give him thanks and praise, for his goodness and mercy are without end!