

Friday (William Law)

Do not all Christians desire to have Christ as their saviour? Yes, but here is the deceit; all would have Christ to be their saviour in the *next* world and to help them into heaven when they die. But his salvation, if it is to be had, must be had in *this* world, by changing and altering all that is within you, by helping you to a new heart.

Scripture (Romans 3:21-25)

God's saving justice was witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, but now it has been revealed altogether apart from law: God's saving justice given in faith through Jesus Christ to all who believe. No distinction is made: all have sinned and lack God's glory, and all are justified by the free gift of his grace through being set free in Christ Jesus. God appointed him as a sacrifice for reconciliation, through faith, by shedding his blood.

For more detailed discussion notes on the following questions, please go to www.sthelenscrosby.org.uk and click on 'prayer' for 'Thinking outside the pew'

Q1 If you were in the crowd, what would you expect Peter to say when you asked, 'What must we do?'

Q2 How many areas of your life are baptised in the name of Jesus?

Q3 How do we discern the voice of Jesus in daily life?

Q4 Does listening to the Good Shepherd mean we should be separate from society?

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4th Week of Easter

Sheep who follow His voice, not the crowd.

When Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, speaks to the huge crowd on Pentecost day, he delivers a bold and no punches pulled account of just how wrong they had been in crucifying Jesus: they had killed the one sent by God, the one who the whole of history had pointed to; the one who would usher in the fulfilment of God's plan for the Messianic Age. The note that they were 'cut to the heart' means that they were in no doubt about the enormity of their mistake, so in asking the question, 'What must we do?' they must have expected to be told, 'nothing; you've ruined everything', or to be told of serious consequences and a long road of reparation.

Peter's answer seems to go a lot easier on them: no long penances, no exile, but 'Repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins'. This repenting and Baptism, though, is a decisive and life-changing action for a number of reasons. Firstly, each person, having been made fully aware of the sinfulness which caused them to reject and kill Jesus, has to trust that they are forgiven. This forgiveness is not saying 'it doesn't matter', or 'let's forget about it', neither does it excuse what they did. It says that their faults are not an obstacle to to them being welcomed into the new Kingdom and a full relationship with Jesus. It is often at the times when we are most acutely aware of our failings that we find it hardest to accept that anyone, including God, could possibly want anything to do with us.

It is this forgiveness which comes with accepting the life-changing baptism in the name of Jesus: to be baptised is to be immersed, to be completely taken over by; the 'name' of Jesus is everything he stands for.

The effect of Peter's speech goes deeper than can be explained by him being a learned or charismatic. Because he is filled with the Spirit, 'the sheep' are responding to a call by Jesus, present in Peter. When Jesus uses the image of himself as the gate of the sheepfold, (John 10:1-10), he is making clear that it is only through him that leaders will be able to lead the sheep. It is important to know the way sheep were kept in the sheepfold, and how the shepherds acted. At night, all the sheep from different flocks would be kept together in the one sheepfold. In the morning, each shepherd would stand at the gate and call out his own sheep, who would respond to his voice – among the many other voices, and with sheep following different ways.

Coming after Jesus' condemnation of the religious leaders for their "spiritual blindness", it is obvious who the false shepherds are. The sheep don't listen to the false leaders, but they do listen to Peter who speaks 'in the name' of Jesus.

As the current flock, we too hear many voices which call for a response. One of these voices is that of the risen Jesus, (heard through the Gospel, the Eucharist, through prayer and through various spirit-filled shepherds.) Other voices call, which, apart from the more obvious 'false gods', are often reasonable and seem to offer security, comfort and happiness. They do not, however, lead to the fullness of life promised by Jesus. To discern his voice, we need to be baptised in his name: all aspects of life filled with his presence. This will often put us at odds with the values and assumptions of our own culture, as clearly happened to the early Christians, but by living in this new relationship, others we share our lives with will come to know the Good Shepherd through us – maybe not 3,000, but we aren't Peter!

Martin Bennett

Monday (Cardinal Basil Hume)

Repent, we are told, turn away from sin. Believe the Gospel not as an ideology to talk about, not as an abstract system of values to be discussed among learned persons. Conversion begins deep within ourselves, it involves radical change inside ourselves which then alters the way we relate to God and to fellow human beings. It is a change of heart. It leads us to embrace wholeheartedly what the Gospel says and to love Him who says it.

Scripture (Acts 2:36-41)

You can be certain that the Lord and Christ whom God has made is this Jesus whom you crucified. Hearing this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'What are we to do?' 'You must repent,' Peter answered, 'And everyone of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.' He spoke to them and urged them, 'Save yourselves from this perverse generation.'

Tuesday (Henri Nouwen)

Following Jesus demands of you in the first place obedience to his Gospel. Don't be afraid that this obedience will impoverish your personality. No laws, no rules, no therapy no discussions, are capable of setting our communities in order and making them fruitful if the Spirit of Jesus is not reigning there. Free yourself from a world that seeks only pleasures and possessions. Through your radical surrender to God, you will be free from this.

Scripture (2 Corinthians 3:14-18)

Until this very day, the veil remains over the reading of the Old Testament to those with closed minds: it is not lifted, for only in Christ is it done away with. Their hearts are covered with a veil, and this veil will not be taken away until they turn to the Lord. Now this Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with our unveiled faces like mirrors reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the image that we reflect in brighter and brighter glory; this is the working of the Lord who is the Spirit.

Wednesday (Thomas Merton)

In Christ God is made man. In him, God and man are no longer separate, remote from one another, but inseparably one. In Christ everything that is divine and supernatural becomes accessible on the human level to every one of us. What is divine has now become connatural to us in Christ's love so that if we receive him and are united to him in friendship, he who is at the same time God and our brother, grants us the divine life that is now able to be ours on our human level.

Scripture (Colossians 1:13-20)

God has rescued us from the ruling force of darkness and has transferred us to the kingdom of the Son that he loves, and in him we enjoy our freedom, the forgiveness of sin. He is the image of the unseen God, the first-born of all creation, for in him were created all things in heaven and on earth. All things were created through him and for him. He exists before all things and in him all things hold together, and he is the head of the body, that is, the Church. God wanted all fullness to be found in him and through him to reconcile all things to him by making peace through his death on the cross.

Thursday (Fr. Richard Rohr.)

Relationship is a by-product of a journey shared between those seeking the same goal, between those who eat the same bread and drink from the same cup. A *companion*, literally, is "one who eats bread with us." Jesus calls us to be his companion on the journey to the Father. He says: Walk with me. Trust my faith. Trust my love. Trust my hope. And I will walk with you. He is a partner. He is a brother. He eats bread with us. Christians are afraid to believe how deep, real and powerful that relationship is between companions of Jesus, those who are on the same path together.

Scripture (John 10:2-4,9-10)

He who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the flock; the gatekeeper lets him in, the sheep hear his voice, one by one he calls his own sheep and leads them out. He goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow because they know his voice. I am the gate. Anyone who enters through me will be safe: such a one will go in and out and will find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that you may have life and have it to the full.