

Homily Guide for Appeal Weekend (Tied to the Readings for May 6/7, Fourth Sunday of Easter)

Scriptures for Sunday, May 6

First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 2:14A, 36-41

Responsorial: Psalm 23: 1-3A, 3B4, 5, 6

Second Reading: 1 Peter 2:20B-25

Gospel: John 10:1-10

Sample Homily for Appeal Sunday

Theme: Good Shepherd Sunday

As you may recall, last week in our first reading, Peter began his sermon to the Jews in Jerusalem where he spoke about the insulting, the improbable, the impossible, and for many in his audience, the inconceivable. This typically stoic hothead we got to know (and love) in the gospels had suddenly let loose a barrage of statements and accusations that I'm sure left many of his listeners stunned if not angry. He throws at them:

- "This man, delivered up by the set plan and foreknowledge of God, **you** killed, using lawless men to crucify him." (the insulting)
- Jesus was given to you (the improbable)
- But then God raised him up (the impossible)
- And finally exalted him at God's right hand (the inconceivable)

He must have hit a nerve because in today's first reading the impossible has become the possible. Peter tells the crowd that Jesus, the Lord and the Christ, was one of them, of the house of Israel, and so they all still have a chance to claim him. Beautifully, through the persuasion of the Holy Spirit, he boldly challenged his hearers to admit that they had totally missed the message contained in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and to open themselves to faith in the Christ. And it worked; three thousand persons were baptized!

Now these Jews were not bad people. On the contrary the bible labels them "devout" while they gathered in the city to give prayerful worship to God. The reason for their delay in believing was simple: they thought they already knew God and his plans and were living as if they knew.

This happens in our gospel story as well. Using the Old Testament image of sheep and their shepherd, Jesus describes his own mission as one of a caring and protecting shepherd and his listeners as the sheep. Many seemed to respond well to this image because they reacted just as sheep that had been listening to the shepherd. But there were those present, the Pharisees, who could not accept Jesus' message. How could they? They didn't know the shepherd's voice.

Our readings today speak of those who can be stubborn in their beliefs even though the beliefs fall short of the truth. But in the end, with great relief, they listened and believed and followed. Have we been listening? Have we been able to hear the shepherd? Do we recognize his voice? Did you hear that we have been given great and wonderful gifts, the gift of Christ himself? And in him we've been given the gift of baptism, we've been given the gift of forgiveness; we've been given the gift of the Church. And I'm sure with a little effort we can list several hundred, if not thousands, more gifts. The event we witnessed just a few weeks ago brought forth these gifts from the opened tomb and wants to flood us with the Risen Lord's grace and spirit of understanding.

Like the early followers of Jesus and at times like the Pharisees we think we know God and are comfortable in that knowledge. Easter is the season of life and a more profound reflecting on all that life gives us and all that Christ calls us to be. As Christians, our life is rooted in Christ; as Catholics, our life is rooted in the Church. This is the source of all good gifts that we so often take advantage of.

After explaining the truth to the Jewish people, Peter convinced them of the truth that is Jesus. Thousands were baptized. After pointing out that he was the loving shepherd offering protection from a vicious and deadly world, the Pharisees still refused the truth. Our loving Father, besides giving us such great gifts that we have, has gifted us with the freedom to choose. Jesus chose sacrifice, not for the sake of suffering but for the benefit of others, for the life and salvation of all people. And because of that sacrifice we can celebrate this wonderful season of Easter, the fruit of His sacrifice. In our own baptism and the sacraments we participate in regularly, we declare our allegiance with Jesus' choice and step forward to join Him in his sacrifice. As we heard in our second reading today, "If you are patient when you suffer for doing what is good, this is grace before God."

Today, on this fourth Sunday of The Resurrection, and this year's Diocesan Catholic Appeal Sunday, we have a wonderful opportunity to live out our name "Christian" – to be Christ-like by trusting that The Cross always leads to resurrection and that our sacrifice will always lead to a fuller life. Today, while celebrating the joys and gifts of our faith, we join all our brothers and sisters in our diocese as our shepherd, Bishop Robert Coerver, invites us to participate in this year's campaign. We take seriously the Eucharist (to give thanks) so we turn back to God and tell Him with trusting hearts, "**Take Lord, Receive.**" Our renewed commitment to the Diocese of Lubbock, Christ's Church of Lubbock, and our stewardship to this year's campaign, will help our bishop fulfill his vision as he leads his flock guided by the Spirit of love, mercy and wisdom.

The commitment that you, our parish, will make will touch thousands of lives in ways we may never know. The vocation of marriage and the families of our diocese will be strengthened through the Office of Marriage and Family Life. Catechists and teachers will receive training and support through the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis, Catholic schools and after school programs will find their support so that children and young people can grow in the beauty of our Catholic faith. Ministries on all our college and university campuses will be strengthened and supported so our sons and daughters will know they are not abandoned by the church. Men who aspire to serve as priests and deacons will be educated and trained, women whom God is calling to be religious sisters will be encouraged, so that our 63 parishes in the diocese can be adequately staffed and served with ordained and vowed individuals responding to God's loving call. And parishes in rural areas will continue to provide the Sacraments with the love and support received from the wider diocesan church. These are but a few examples of how our simple prayer - "**Take Lord, Receive**" – and our individual responses will continue to provide the promise of the resurrection others.

In a few moments, you will be invited to complete your commitment form for this year's campaign. Every gift, no matter how small, when given with love, helps to grow our beautiful Catholic faith in our diocese. Every response made in love is always a priceless gift. Your gift, no matter the size, will bring about the positive change that Jesus calls us to create in the world. And together as we tell our loving God, "**Take Lord, Receive,**" we do so with confident trust that God's generosity can never be outdone, that our giving will **always** be bested by our receiving from the infinite well of God's generous love. Thank you in advance for your generous response. God bless you. God bless our parish and the Catholic Diocese of Lubbock.