

Shepherd, Gate, Life
(May 3, 2020)

(4th Sunday of Easter: Acts 2:36-41; 1 Peter 2:20-25; John 10:1-10)

“Faith is not a noun but a verb.” Grammatically this assertion is patently false, and yet its meaning is obvious.

Continuing last week’s theme of the path, we can say that faith is taking the first step. Here I mean the precise moment when our faith becomes a genuinely personal encounter, when we discover that our relationship with the Lord is essential to our existence.

In the first reading, Peter concludes his Pentecost speech: “Let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” The Apostle is making the message known to all his people.

In his letter, Peter gives words of encouragement in a time of suffering: “Christ bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.” The Beautiful Lady shows the image of her crucified Son even as she speaks of sin and conversion.

She is addressing those who, in the first reading, are called “this corrupt generation.” We need to separate ourselves from everything, within and without, that debases us in any way. Her call to conversion expresses a hope that Peter states as fact: “You had gone astray like sheep, but you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.” Which leads us to our Gospel, where it seems John could have used a good editor. Distinct images are jumbled together.

First, Jesus is not a thief or a robber, but the shepherd who “calls his own sheep by name and leads them out;” then he is “the gate,” then “All who came before me are thieves and robbers,” then he is the gate again, then once more not a thief, and finally he declares: “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.”

This last sentence is what holds the rest together. Whichever image we prefer, abundance of life is what it is meant to convey. Mary’s discourse at La Salette lacks a certain logic in parts, but the message is clear: when we return to the Shepherd, we find life.

And he will lead us to that place which the Psalmist this week tells of.

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