

Fourth Sunday of Easter – April 22, 2018

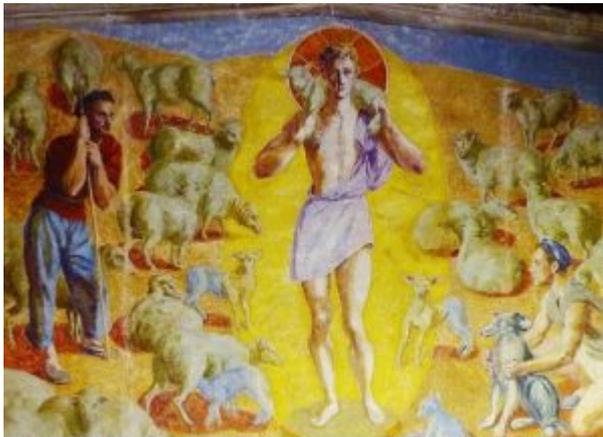
Acts of the Apostles 4: 8-12 1 John 3: 1-2 John 10: 11-18

There are times when we can easily overlook what might be considered subtleties in the Scriptures. An incident is recorded. It is the main point of that incident that captures our attention. What might seem to be only a passing remark is ignored. Today presents what I believe is an example of this. We heard, in the passage from the Acts of the Apostles, Peter boldly preaching. He makes the statement that there is “no salvation through anyone else.” He adds: “nor any name given to the human race by which we are saved.”

In the context that he is preaching, he is addressing leaders of the Jewish people. It might seem that his concern is only with them and their apparent lack of leadership. But he is also speaking in an area, a country, occupied by Roman soldiers, subject to the Roman emperor. Peter was not only making an audacious statement to the Jewish leaders, that they had failed in their task as leaders, he was also making a challenge to and a contradiction of the claim that it was the Roman emperor, often declared to be divine, who was the “Lord and Savior” of his subjects.

We need to recall that this exalted idea or attitude was not just a part of ancient Rome and its empire. History over the centuries is filled with examples of those claiming a similar authority and dignity, often coupled with force as well as death and destruction of any opposition. That same kind of

thinking is still found today in many places around the world.



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In contrast to these images, we are presented with Jesus Christ, God who became man. He is put before us as a leader, yes, but in the simplicity of the "Good Shepherd." It is not an image of fear-inducing power, but one who us humble, one who guides, one who protects. It is not a leadership that seeks to

overpower and control, but a leadership that is present, loving and embracing.

If there is an underlying message during this Easter season, and especially on this Sunday when we recall the "Good Shepherd," it is this: The presence of God, the presence that overcomes death in the Resurrection, the presence that we share through baptism, the presence that allows us to be considered "children of God," is the presence that seeks reconciliation with us and offers genuine salvation to us.

These are not vague ideas or pious thoughts. These are ways of describing the effective possibilities available to us as well as the possibilities to be achieved by us. Reconciliation and salvation can be understood as the manner by which creation, this world in which we live, this reality of which we are all a part, becomes what it ought to be, what God intends it to be, through our being part of a reconciling and restoring effort.

Achieving salvation, achieving in our lives all that builds us up and restores us, and doing so for all of creation that is affected by us is a genuine reflection of and revelation of our God and Creator. It is the ridding from ourselves and from all that is around us whatever limits or diminishes an experience of the reality of God's presence. A question, then, that we can ask ourselves is this: do the words we speak, the actions we do, bring about reconciliation, salvation, the revelation of God? Does this take place day after day and throughout each day?

The image of the Good Shepherd is put before us today as a means of making evident to us how our God seeks to be united with us by loving, guiding and protecting us. It is also presented to us as a challenge to us to show that image in ourselves so that we allow ourselves and those who are a part of our lives to appreciate that the true "Lord and Savior" is not some earthly authority or power, but our truly good and gracious God.