

4th Sunday of Easter - April 17, 2016

1st Reading: Acts 13:14, 43-52 [I have made you a light to the nations]

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 100 "We are your people, the sheep of your flock."

2nd Reading: Revelation – [The Lamb on the throne will shepherd the ones who have survived the great persecution]

Gospel: John 15:14-15, 27-30 [I am the Good Shepherd, I know my sheep and they follow me.]

♪ I want to walk as a child of the light, I want to follow Jesus.

God set the stars to give light to the world; the star of my life is Jesus.

In him there is no darkness at all, the night and the day are both alike.

The Lamb is the light of the city of God, shine in my heart, Lord Jesus. ♪

I want to walk as a child of the light. Do you? The Easter preface I will be using today says that *God* has made us children of the light. The Scriptures show us how to walk in that light.

In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Paul & Barnabas are living the Word of the Lord from Isaiah which they quote: "*I have made you a light to the ends of the earth.*" They are speaking about the resurrection of Jesus which can save us from sin and death.

They are walking in the light of Christ - and it gets them in trouble. They have to make a choice to follow the shepherd even when they are persecuted. They are among the ones in the 2nd reading who have survived the great persecution. They decide to follow the good shepherd as part of *his* flock, rather than following the herd of people who refuse to listen to his truth and love.

Sometimes we have to make the same choice. It really helps to have the support of other people, that's why we come to church on the weekend, that's why we belong to a parish or a campus ministry or a group of spiritual seekers - so we can support each other and even protect each other from those who might hurt us.

That's how we remind each other that we are *God's* flock.



Like the first followers of Jesus, we may have to go against the crowd, when people act like a mob or a herd and get caught up in a culture of violence or cruelty or condemnation of others just because they are different.

That happens today all over the world. It is even part of some political debates. One group is at war with another, usually because of greed and lust for power. People who are immigrants, like my grandparents and most of our ancestors, are sometimes treated worse than animals, even by the law. At times we have to change laws or customs that lead to injustice, prejudice or even killing.

I know a man who is in prison right now. He has been there for almost 20 years. I have visited him since 2004 and he has become more like a brother to me than someone I am helping or even a friend. His sentence was completed on March 24th, Holy Thursday, and I had made arrangements to get him to NYC where the rest of his family lives.

But he was kept in prison past the end of his sentence because of a very rigid law and regulations that took no account of his behavior & growth. While in prison, he entered into recovery for alcoholism & met some volunteers who helped him face his past & his crimes. He has deeply grieved the damage he had caused & has earned 2 college degrees while incarcerated.

I experience *him* as a child of the light, forgiven, healed and passionately wanting to help others who have been imprisoned to face themselves & grow towards wholeness. He continues to follow the way of Christ - even though he is being oppressed by a flawed system that is based on vengeance and retribution.

He reminds me of the apostles in the reading from Acts and the crowd in the reading from Revelation, who have been through the great persecution. His story asks the same question of us that I hear in today's readings from Scripture:

Am I ready to follow the way of Christ even if that includes discomfort and resistance?

I have wanted to walk as a child of the light since I was very young. But as a child I thought that it meant that I was supposed to shine, that I had to be perfect! God purified that desire as I grew.

When I was 10, I told my mother I wanted to be a priest. Her response was: "*take out the garbage*". When I was 14 I fell in love, and somehow that opened my ears to remember the call I had heard as a child, the call that led me to become a Franciscan and a priest, the call that has me standing here before you today. Once I felt the power of love, I wanted more, I wanted to love people as much as I could, I wanted to change the world, one person at a time, and I wanted to love as much as Jesus did.

I thought, then, that the only way to do that was to become a priest & join a religious community. Now I know better. Oh, it's still the best way for me & for Sr. Anna, and for anyone who is called to do it. But the Scriptures and the Church, especially through the Second Vatican Council, have made me aware that ALL OF US are called to holiness. We *all* belong to the flock Jesus loves. We are all called to follow him as children of the light in different ways.

I have learned that *anyone* can walk as a child of the light, that you are called by God to walk as a child of the light whether you are a student or a teacher, a farmer or a lawyer, a parent or a spouse, & even someone who has been in prison and chooses to repent. As I look at you, all the generations are represented - and all of you are children of one God, whether you are retired, young parents, teens or children; whether you are sick, healthy, handicapped, regular or occasional church goers, gay or straight, Republicans or Democrats.

I began my life wanting to be a star, to be full of the light of perfection. Now I know that perfection is about following the light, following the shepherd rather than being a star.

I am able to do that when I remember what today's readings say:

Jesus tells me that I am loved by God! (No one can take me out of God's arms)

And I trust the Lamb of God to shepherd me, as the reading from Revelation promises.

With the grace of Christ I can sizzle with the Spirit, like Paul and Barnabas (who rejoice even when they were being persecuted, and slandered by a media blitz in Antioch - today they would be smeared on Twitter & Facebook). They were not controlled by what other people thought, they were guided from within.

I used to ask the question, WHAT WOULD JESUS DO? But now I ask it more specifically - What does Jesus want ME to do?

When we begin to walk as children of the light, some changes will happen:

When our friends and family look at us, they will see the love of Jesus.

When they listen to us, they will hear the wisdom of God's truth - even if they are not aware that it comes from God.

When they are in our presence, they will feel the presence of the Holy Spirit in us and in themselves. I feel that presence when I am with the man I know who is in prison.

We gather at Eucharist to remind each other of the call God gives to each of us and all of us. When we hear the Word of God and receive the Body and Blood of Christ, we are given the power to answer that call, to see who we are and to be what we receive.

*♪ I want to see the brightness of God, I want to look at Jesus.
Clear sun of righteousness shine on my path and show me the way to the Father.
In him there is no darkness at all, the night and the day are both alike
The Lamb is the light of the city of God, shine in my heart, Lord Jesus. ♪*

