

Sermon written by Fr Jeremy for all Saints Church, Boyne Hill for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Texts Acts 2: 42-47 & John 10: 1-10

If you were asked, what is the universal symbol of Christianity? The majority would probably respond with the cross. Yes, we can think of the powerful symbols of the paschal candle and new light and life. Obviously, the symbols of bread and wine that become for us the gift of New Life but what we remember in the Eucharist is the cross that leads to New Life. Death leading to Resurrection.

In the earliest days of Christianity though, the instrument of Christ's victory, the cross was seldom represented as early Christians were reluctant to depict the gallows on which common criminals were executed. In a book (*The Image of Christ*) from the National Gallery and with an Introduction by Neil MacGregor who was the Director of the Gallery at the time of publishing we find late 3<sup>rd</sup> or early 4<sup>th</sup> century images of Christ carrying the sheep across his soldiers reminding us of the one who will lay down his life for his sheep.

In John chapter 10 we discover the shepherd as one who cares for the sheep, meets their needs, and protects them from harm and is the gateway to New Life. The shepherd is the one who we find leads people to fresh pastures and rescues any that find themselves in difficulty. We discover a shepherd who is the servant, the one who puts others needs before his own and who is willing to sacrifice his life that we might have new life.

We as Christ's people (His sheep) should know and discern his voice and his vocation for us. We need to know what part we can play in being a member of his body the Church. This church as Pope Francis has reminded us should be a church open to all, a church of mercy, a place where pastoral care is of paramount importance. In 1 Peter 2. 9-10 we discover that 'You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a dedicated nation, a people chosen by God for his own, to proclaim the glorious deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light'.

The church that is expressing this love, this care, this passion to reflect the way of Christ will encourage others to follow. In the early part of Acts that we have as our text today and Acts 4:32 we find two texts that I used as part of my presentation on interview for All Saints nearly 15 years ago. As Tom Wright tells us (*Acts for Everyone*) we find in Acts 2.42-47 the four marks of the church. The Apostles teaching, the common life of those that believed, the breaking of bread and prayers. This means the communion of people giving tirelessly to supporting each other and with agencies supporting the wider communities not just locally but across the world. What a challenge – This is a great mission. In Acts 4:32 people were excited 'The whole group of believers was united in heart and soul. – Others were eager to join!'

I have in sermons (The spoken word rather than the written) dared to make a comparison with a film. Yes, you know I love cinema. That film which dear Elaine used to chuckle at when I mentioned it. The 1989 classic romantic comedy 'When Harry met Sally'. The film set over a 12year period in New York where young professionals Harry (Billy Crystal) and Sally (Meg Ryan) go from meeting at college to becoming good friends and the viewer hopes becoming a couple. The film made Meg Ryan a star not least because of that two -minute scene of heavy breathing in a packed restaurant. One on looker says to the waiter 'I'll have what she having!' It is maybe a bit rude, but we want the outsider to be interested, to be drawn into the story, to be excited by the Christian journey.

The model of the Good Shepherd leads to the model of a pastoral church. A church as St Peter says we are all called to. The understanding of the church as 'Communion' I believe helps us to be this church.

1. A church of Trinitarian relationships. A vertical relationship with God as the father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The horizontal relationship described in Acts 2 with each other built upon agapeic love.
2. A church that through our Baptism we become beloved adopted sons and daughters of Christ. We are to use our gifts to go into the world, to walk in God's light to rejoice in God's love and to reflect God's glory. We are the Body of Christ using our gifts.
3. A sacramental church – as Henri De Lubac, a leading light of Vatican II said, 'If Christ is the sacrament of God, the church is for us the sacrament of Christ.' ( De Lubac, H. Catholicism) . I think this means that if Christ reflects God's love within the world, when Christ rose to New Life, we were given his Spirit at Pentecost to live as a resurrection people. We partake of the body of Christ to become the body of Christ to the world.
4. We are the people of God or a pilgrim people. We are journeying together through this life not as perfect people but as vulnerable people who need the love of the Good shepherd and the support of each other. We though, are journeying together and we are noticing others on the way that need our care, our love. We journey knowing that the best is yet to come, journeying towards the heavenly banquet.
5. Leaven to the World – we discern God's word, we pray over it, we break bread together and we care for each other. With Christ as our faithful Shepherd we pray that we can offer pastoral care to those around us.

In this time of terrible need, of fear and worry for the future, of worries for loved ones we give thanks that we have the loving Shepherd to guide and protect us. We give thanks too for all those in key roles within our world offering that pastoral love to others. Within our own church we give thanks in prayer for all of you building community pastorally even when we cannot physically gather. Let us continue to be the pastoral church that the loving shepherd, Jesus desires of us.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen,