

*Fourth Sunday of Easter*

**JESUS THE DOOR**

INVOCATION

+ In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen  
Christ is risen! Alleluia!  
He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

PERSONAL REFLECTION

*In your own words ask God to be with you in this time of prayer...*

*Then take a few moments to reflect on your life in the last few days, and in your own words speak to God about it, asking him to amend what is wrong, and to affirm what is good.*

*Then say:*

Holy God,  
holy and strong,  
holy and immortal,  
have mercy on me.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY

Risen Christ,  
faithful shepherd of your Father's sheep,  
gateway and guardian of eternal life:  
teach us to hear your voice  
and to follow your command,  
that your people may be gathered into one flock,  
to the glory of God the Father.  
Amen.

## READINGS

*Read: Acts 2.42 – end*

*St Luke concludes his account of the Day of Pentecost with a summary of the new life that fellowship in Christ made possible. He describes the four essentials of the Christian life: learning from the apostles, a common life of service and care, breaking bread together, and prayer. John Macquarrie said the the fellowship of the Early Church seemed to the world like the advent of a new humanity. Here the traditional barriers of race, gender and social status were overcome (cf. Galatians 3.28). It was a sign of the unity for which Jesus prayed – the one flock and the one shepherd about which he speaks in today's gospel reading.*

*Take time to reflect on the reading, particularly of the part that the four essentials play in your life.*

*Say: Psalm 23*

*Read: John 10.1–10*

*Think about the reading, particularly the image of Jesus as the gateway. What does it say to you?*

## REFLECTION

'I have set before you an open door which no one can shut.' (*Revelation 3.8*) The idea of an open door leading to a new beginning and a new life speaks to all our hopes – not simply because we yearn for something better, but also because the fulfilment of hope involves personal renewal. For some a new beginning will mean an escape from the past, perhaps in a dramatic way like taking on a new identity, cutting all links with their former life. The Christian idea is rather different. It is about being freed from past failures and receiving new strength for the future, but not in any

escapist way in which the past is denied and obliterated from memory. In the new beginning that Jesus offers us we take our past with us, not obliterated but healed. We need to own the past if we are to learn from it and avoid simply repeating it, but in Christ's new day we are no longer determined by it, nor weighed down by it; we are made new. Someone I was speaking to recently put it beautifully when he said, 'I became a new version of me.'

Jesus is both the key to this new life and its guardian. He is the key because he makes it possible through his divine gifts of forgiveness and of the Holy Spirit; he is the guardian because he himself is the door, the entrance to the place where newness of life can be found. As he said:

I am the door; anyone who comes into the fold through me will be safe. He will go in and out and find pasture.'

*John 10.9*

Jesus is not just the key, but the door itself. In his day the shepherd used to sleep across the entrance to the fold; his body kept the sheep safe, and entry to the sheepfold was, quite literally, 'through' him. In Orthodox Christianity this image is transposed to the church building: an icon of the head and shoulders of Christ is often placed above the entrance; if the whole figure were represented the doorway would be his body, so that, in effect, the faithful enter through him. The two images of the key and the door belong together, and they are brought together in the Revelation to John:

These are the words of the Holy One, the True One, who has David's Key, so that when he opens the door, no one can shut it, and when he shuts it no one can open it: I know what you are doing. I have set before you an open door which no one can shut.

*Revelation 3.7-8*

The claim to have the power of the keys is a claim of authority. Jesus can offer the gifts of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit because of the authority committed to him. Right from the beginning of his ministry it was his authority that marked Jesus out. It is almost the first thing that St Mark tells us about him. At Capernaum, he says, Jesus ‘went to the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, for, unlike the scribes, he taught with a note of authority.’ (*Mark 1.22*)

God’s new beginning is nothing less than life in all its fullness. Rowan Williams has described it as an integrated life, ‘living in a way that expresses with complete integrity who and what we really are. Living in a way that weaves together knowing and loving and judging and forgiving in one act of self-sharing that is beyond the fragmented and reactive ways that we so often live.’ This is a richer and deeper understanding than the conventional claim to be living life to the full, with its associations of a wealth of experiences and adventurous activity. Life in all its fullness may well include these things, but essentially, in the Christian understanding, it is a foretaste of life in communion with God, eternal life, the life of heaven. ‘Eternal life’ does not refer simply to life after death; it is more a quality of life, a mode of being, that can be experienced here and now within the Christian fellowship into which the Christian is initiated in baptism, and in which we are sustained by our communion with Christ. (As the bread and the wine are received in holy communion the words of administration are that the divine gift will *keep us* in eternal life.) It is the fullness of human life offered by God. ‘It is to be able to receive from God the richness of intimacy, liberty and love we were made for, and to be free to give this love back to God and outwards to others.’ In spiritual terms a full life is a connected life, in which our beliefs, feelings, values, intuitions and actions form a unity. E. M. Forster in his novel *Howards End* speaks of connecting the prose and the passion; without that connection, he

said, 'we are meaningless fragments ... unconnected arches that have never joined into a man.' I am inclined to think that the problems of modern life – the sense of dislocation, lack of meaning, high levels of stress, fractured relationships – derive from the lack of connection in our lives; our lives are unfulfilled because they are disconnected and unbalanced, part of the rootlessness described in the last chapter. We know that life should be different, and we hope for something better. This hope is made real in Christ whose life was completely integrated, the truly human life. E. M. Forster's heroine, Margaret, felt that it was hard-going in the roads of her husband's soul; she longed for him to build 'the rainbow bridge' that should connect the prose in us with the passion, a gift that that she believed was latent in his own soul, but which he had so far not been able to discover. 'Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer.'

*I have set before you an open door which no one can shut.* Jesus fulfils our hope for an integrated life, by setting before us a door that is permanently open; anyone may pass through it, no one is excluded, and the promise that it is permanently open means that our hopes are assured. Faith in Jesus has the power to re-connect a fragmented life, but something is required of us if we wish to do so because integration is not something that happens automatically; we have to want it. To use E. M. Forster's phrase, we have to do our part in building the rainbow bridge that connects the prose and the passion of our lives. God comes to our aid, but we have to seize our hope and work towards its realisation.

From *Light in the Darkness* by Peter Sills, to be published by Sacristy Press in mid-May. The quotations are from Rowan Williams, *Living life to the full*, [www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk](http://www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk) (with slight adaptations), and E M Forster, *Howards End*, chapter 19.

*Pause and reflect.*

PRAISE

Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!  
He has given us new life and hope.

He has raised Jesus from the dead:  
he has claimed us as his own.

He has brought us out of darkness:  
he has made us a light to the world.

Christ once raised from the dead dies no more:  
death has no more dominion over him.

In dying he died to sin once and for all:  
in living he lives to God.

See yourselves therefore as dead to sin  
and alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS

*A time of free prayer and intercession. You may like to use the traditional five-fold pattern:*

For the Church

For the World

For family, friends, neighbours and the local community

For the sick and all in need, near and far

For those who have died

*At the end:*

Merciful Father,  
accept my prayers,

for the sake of your Son,  
our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

## CONCLUSION

Our Father...

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
The love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all, now and for ever.

Amen