Spirituality
Scripture for Life
Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



Sr. Victoria Amie Tholley, a member of Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny, consoles Nana Kamara in Makeni, Sierra Leone, on Sept. 20, 2023. Kamara is among thousands of Ebola survivors who have been rejected by their families and communities after the Ebola outbreak that hit Sierra Leone in 2014. (GSR Photo/Doreen Ajiambo)



by Sr. Mary M. McGlone

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They say that no good deed goes unpunished. Today's reading from Acts depicts the irony of the human mindset at just about any time in history. What leads us to react negatively to someone who is doing good? Is it that they are not part of our party — be it the Sadducees, the Republicans or the Democrats? Is it that they did the good thing in a way that we didn't like or was in competition with us? Perhaps we just don't like the person and nothing they do can seem good to us.

Peter and his companions were arrested for doing a good deed — for healing a cripple. As Peter explains why he did what he did, we see how he was interiorizing Jesus' way of being. As Acts tells the story, Peter claimed no glory or power for himself, but explained that all he did was done in the name of Jesus.

That obviously rankles the powers who had recently approved of Jesus' execution. They thought they were done with him — but not only did his newly audacious disciples declare that he lived, they acted like him and went about doing what he did. Instead of dying, the Jesus movement was spreading!

Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 21, 2024

Acts 4:8-12
Psalm 118
1 John 3:1-2
John 10:11-18

This story offers a prelude to the Gospel of the good shepherd. The selection we read today says nothing about the good shepherd abandoning 99 and going after one. Rather, here we meet the pastor who says that he will do anything — even give his life — for his sheep.

Jesus contrasts a good shepherd with one who works for pay rather than for love of the sheep. Folks like that aren't necessarily bad, but they aren't much good when evil strikes and divides the flock.

A key to understanding the good shepherd is that she or he (many women tend sheep) knows the sheep and they know their shepherd. That knowledge is more than the ability to recognize a voice or a familiar figure.

The knowledge Jesus is talking about — now referring to people — is an intimate, interior knowledge. Those who know one another like this are bound together from their insides out. Jesus claims that their mutual relationship mirrors his relationship with God the Father. They exist in one another more purposely, consciously and lovingly than unborn children live in their mothers' wombs.

The First Letter of John describes this relationship with God by calling us children of God. It echoes John 1:13, explaining that we are born, not in the natural way, but by God's own decision.

In a sense, we might understand our being born of God as the process and goal of our lives. In nature, we are born as God's creatures, part of the creation that naturally exists in God. Being born of God or being children of God adds unfathomable quality to that natural state of blessedness.

Now we turn back to Peter.

Peter claimed that he did what he did "in the name" of Jesus. This isn't about magic words or power. This is Peter's way of saying that he lives in Christ and Christ in him. Peter has known the earthly Jesus and the risen Christ and he has made a choice to live in Christ.

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It's a new and humbling state for him. At last, like Paul, he could say, "I live, no longer I, but Christ in me" (Galatians 2:20).

This is what Peter preached to the religious leaders. He proclaimed that the resurrection of Jesus Christ opened up a new route to God. He wasn't simply talking about a new belief; he was explaining the Spirit-given power that allowed him to

enter ever-more purposely and consciously into the very life of God, participating in the unity of the one flock continually being gathered by the Good Shepherd.

Today's readings invite us into long and oft-repeatable contemplation and action. They invite us to stand alongside Peter and search our hearts until we can explain why it is that we do what we do and what kind of power we are exercising.

Jesus' image of the good shepherd is another variation on the theme we hear throughout John's Gospel: The Son of God became flesh in order to draw us into unity with God and one another, a unity that can be called eternal life.

For Peter, as for us, taking in and taking on the effects of the Resurrection is the task of a lifetime. We accomplish it at least as much in action as in contemplation. While we can believe much *about* Jesus, the real invitation is to believe "through him and with him and in him," becoming ever-more identified with him by loving whom he loves and allowing him to work through us.

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