

Fourth Sunday of Easter

So many Australians rise early to gather for the Anzac Day dawn services. Last year, when our assemblies were very limited, we still chose to stand at the end of our driveways to honour those who gave their lives in the many wars that Australians had been called to serve. Why do we do that? Perhaps it is one of the best ways that we have of expressing our connectedness with one another as Australians. For some that connection is even deeper as they remember a relative who landed at Anzac Cove 106 years ago or served elsewhere in the First World War.

We long to be connected to one another. Today's gospel uses an image to express how connected we are with Jesus. Jesus speaks of himself as the Good Shepherd. We need to imagine the shepherds of his time looking after sheep that usually lived on rocky hills where food was scarce, and predators were many. A shepherd had to be constantly alert looking after those kind of sheep.

The connection that Jesus has to his sheep is profound and intimate. "I am the good shepherd, I know my own, and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father." We can easily underestimate what Jesus is saying here. He is equating his relationship with us to his relationship with his Father. This hardly seems possible. How could Jesus love us with the same love

that he has for his Father? How could Jesus embrace us in the one embrace that he and the Father share?

If we could appreciate this surely our whole lives would be changed. Jesus reinforces what he had just said by adding, "and I lay down my life for my sheep." And it is in the laying down of his life for us that the Father's love for him is made known. "The Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me; I lay it down of my own free will." I am not sure that I understand what Jesus is saying here, but it seems that Jesus is saying that he freely gives up his life in love for us and for his Father. His Father's love for him is expressed by raising him from death. Until he gave up his life for us, his Father's love for him was still hidden from us.

The intimate connection that Jesus has with us is expressed also today in the beautiful first letter of St. John. Everything in that letter is about God's love for us. God's love for us has made us one with Jesus and with Jesus we are truly God's children. We are called to live as God's children in this life and to share the inheritance of being God's children in the next. When we understand who we are as God's children then we begin to act as God's children. We begin to be like God our Father in the way that we think and act towards one another. We begin to be like Jesus our brother in the way that we

allow the mercy and forgiveness of God to be seen in what we do. The more that we act like God the more likely we are to see where God is in our world today. And through the way that we live, others will be able to see where God is too. We will be preparing our hearts for eternity, where we will be able to see God as God really is.

Our connection with Jesus and one another is also spoken about by Peter in today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles. Peter explains why a cripple is now able to walk. "It was by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, the one you crucified, whom God raised from the dead." To act in the name of someone is to act in the power of that person. That is what we do as Church. We act in the name and the power of Jesus the Christ. And then Peter describes Jesus. "This is the stone rejected by you the builders, but which has proved to be the keystone." The keystone is the stone that is put at the top of an arch to hold all the other stones together. The arch will fall down without it. In the psalm Jesus is described as the cornerstone. Again, he is the one who connects the two walls and holds them together. Today we are invited to celebrate our connectedness to Jesus. Our life depends upon it. The life of our Church depends upon it.

This weekend is set aside as World Day of Prayer for Vocations. It is a day for us to remember that for every

member of our Church our primary vocation comes to us from our Baptism. It is when we are living our vocation as children of God, brothers and sisters of the Lord, that we begin to hear the different ways that we are called to live our lives in service of the Lord and one another. Young people today will only begin to hear a call to priesthood or religious life when they have fallen in love with Jesus. They will only consider a religious vocation when they see the challenge of giving away their life in service of others. They will only want to serve us as priests and religious when they see something of the excitement of working with us as God's Church serving the world. This can be our prayer today for them and for us.