

LIVING THE GOSPEL
FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
Apr 25, 2010



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Theme: "My sheep hear my voice and follow me."

Gathering Prayer

All: Almighty and ever-living God, give us new strength from the courage of Christ our shepherd, and lead us to join the saints in heaven, where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: John 10:27-30

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; ²⁸ and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

Gospel Notes

26-29. Certainly faith and eternal life cannot be merited by man's own efforts: they are a gift of God. But the Lord does not deny anyone grace to believe and be saved because he wishes all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of Truth" (1Tim 2:4). If some tries to avoid receiving the gift of faith, his unbelief is blameworthy. On this point St Thomas Aquinas teaches: "I can see, thanks to the light of the sun; but if I close my eyes, I cannot see; this is no fault of the sun, it is my fault, because by closing my eyes, I prevent the sunlight from reaching me" (*Commentary on St John, ad loc.*).

But those who do not oppose divine grace do come to believe in Jesus. They are known to and loved by him, enter under his protection and remain faithful with the help of his grace, which is a pledge of the eternal life, which the Good Shepherd will eventually

Saturday 10am - 12pm at Church of The Holy Cross (room #03-06)

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The Navarre Bible – Commentaries;
Living Liturgy – Liturgical Ministry, The Liturgical Press;
Emmaus Journey – www.emmausjourney.org

give them. It is true that in this world they will have to strive and in the course of striving they will sustain wounds; but if they stay united to the Good Shepherd nothing and no one will snatch Christ's sheep from him, because our Father, God, is stronger than the Evil One. Our hope that God will grant us final perseverance is not based on our strength but on God's mercy; this hope should always motivate us to strive to respond to grace and to be ever more faithful to the demands of our faith.

30. Jesus reveals that he and the Father are one in substance. Earlier he proclaimed that God was his Father, "making himself equal with God"-which is why a number of times the Jewish authorities think of putting him to death (cf. 5:18; 8:59). Now he speaks about the mystery of God, which is something we can know about only through Revelation. Later on he will reveal more about this mystery, particularly at the Last Supper (14:10; 17: 21-22). It is something the evangelist reflects on at the very beginning of the Gospel, in the prologue (cf. Jn 1:1 and note).

"Listen to the Son himself", St Augustine invites us. " 'I and the Father are one.' He did not say, 'I am the Father' or 'I and the Father are one [Person].' But when he says 'I and the Father are one,' notice the two words '[we are]' and 'one' ... For if they are one, then they are not diverse; if '[we] are', then there is both a Father and a Son" (*In Ioan. Evang.*, 36, 9). Jesus reveals that he is one in substance with the Father as far as divine essence or nature is concerned, but he also reveals that the Father and the Son are distinct Persons: "We believe then in the Father who eternally begets the Son; in the Son, the Word of God, who is eternally begotten; in the Holy Spirit, the uncreated Person who proceeds from the Father and the Son as their eternal Love. Thus in the three divine Persons, *coaeternae sibi et coaequales*, the life and beatitude of God perfectly One superabound and are consummated in the supreme excellence and glory proper to uncreated Being, and always 'there should be venerated Unity in the Trinity and Trinity in the Unity (Paul VI, *Creed of the People of God*, 10).

Gospel Reflection

Hands are strong symbols. Two clasped hands are the logo for the United Way. A child walking hand in hand with an adult is sometimes featured on commercials for Hallmark cards. A child who falls and receives a bump or scratch runs to embracing hands for comfort. Anyone who has sat with a very ill or dying person knows how important the touch of a hand

Closing Prayer

All: Good and gentle Shepherd, you reassure us of your care and protection. Hear our pleas for guidance and help, that one day we may rest with you in eternal life. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen

is—a loving caress, a gentle stroke, the massage of soothing cream. Medical massage therapy is a respected alternative medical practice. All these images and countless others remind us that hands are a symbol for connectedness, care, hope. This Sunday's very brief gospel includes the Good Shepherd's reassuring words, "No one can take them out of my hand."

The gospel conveys Jesus' great, tender care and concern for his "sheep." This care does not keep his followers from "violent abuse" (first reading) or "great distress" (second reading). It does assure them of protection in the midst of persecution ("no one can take them out of my hand") and of eternal life ("they shall never perish"). But this assurance only comes when we followers of Jesus "hear [his] voice" and live out of the personal relationship God offers us.

By juxtaposing hearing and following the gospel intimates that hearing Jesus is already following him. We follow first by listening. The call to follow is a call to faithful obedience (the root word for obedience means "to hear"). In other words, hearing Jesus—heeding his voice—is already an act of following. Heeding Jesus' voice is already our participation in proclaiming the Gospel. But probably most important, hearing Jesus' voice is already our participation in eternal life. Ultimately this promise of eternal life is the reassurance and care that Jesus offers: by hearing Jesus' voice and following him we will not perish, but we already share in Jesus' eternal life. No better care than this could the Good Shepherd offer!

Living the Paschal Mystery

Most of our reflections on the paschal mystery revolve around reminders that being plunged into the dying and rising mystery of Christ through our baptism means we must die to self if we wish to share in Jesus' eternal life. We look for opportunities in our daily living to die to self and thus transform what appear to be ordinary, human actions into extensions of the ministry of the Good Shepherd himself. For example, comforting the sick and dying isn't simply a caring human action; in the context of our baptismal commitment it is an expression of Jesus' love for us and the dignity of the other as a member of the Body of Christ.

This is true and surely the heart of the mystery. This Sunday, however, we might turn this around and rest a bit in what the Good Shepherd offers us when we live the paschal mystery: eternal life, the

assurance that we will never perish. For all our efforts to die to self for the good of others, they do not equal the gift of self that Jesus gives us. Sometimes we are so caught up in the effort of dying that we do forget that new life is already within us and among us. This is a good Sunday to bask in Jesus' care and protection; listen to his voice calling us to his loving, embracing hands; and rejoice in the goodness showered upon us who are faithful to his call. This, too, is living the paschal mystery.

New Testament links

First Reading — Acts 13:14,43-52

¹⁴ ... but they passed on from Perga and came to Antioch of Pisidia. And on the sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. ...

⁴³ And when the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

⁴⁴ The next sabbath almost the whole city gathered together to hear the word of God. ⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy, and contradicted what was spoken by Paul, and reviled him. ⁴⁶ And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.'"

⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. ⁴⁹ And the word of the Lord spread throughout all the region. ⁵⁰ But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. ⁵¹ But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and went to Iconium. ⁵² And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 100:1-3, 5

¹ Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the lands! ² Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! ³ Know that the LORD is God! It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the

sheep of his pasture. ...⁵ For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures for ever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

Second Reading — Revelation 7:9, 14-17

⁹ After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ...

¹⁴ I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night within his temple; and he who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presence. ¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Catechism of The Catholic Church

590 Only the divine identity of Jesus' person can justify so absolute a claim as "He who is not with me is against me"; and his saying that there was in him "something greater than Jonah, . . . greater than Solomon", something "greater than the Temple"; his reminder that David had called the Messiah his Lord,(Cf. Mt 12:6, 30, 36, 37, 41-42) and his affirmations, "Before Abraham was, I AM", and even "I and the Father are one."(Jn 8:58; 10:30)

Sharing and Discussion

1. Why do you think Jesus uses the analogy of sheep to describe us, his followers? How sheep-like are you?
2. What have you learned about listening to his voice, and following him?
3. What is the relationship between following Christ and dwelling in unity with others?