



LIVING THE GOSPEL



**4th Sunday of Easter
April 21, 2024**

Theme: "I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me"

Gathering Prayer

All: Almighty ever-living God, lead us to a share in the joys of heaven, so that the humble flock may reach where the brave Shepherd has gone before. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.. Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: John 10: 11-18.

¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father."

Gospel Focus

In this gospel, Jesus calls himself the good shepherd, and his descriptions of this role make clear that having a shepherd like Jesus is not like being a sheep raised for wool and meat. No matter how tenderly shepherds care for their flock, it is inherently utilitarian relationship. But having a good shepherd like ours is about being known and being loved. We are so loved that there is one willing to lay down his very life for us. Having a good shepherd is also about knowing the shepherd in turn. We may not always feel like we know Jesus, who often moves in subtle and mysterious ways. But we are promised that we have a home in him, and whenever our hearts stir with the recognition that we are known and loved, we can be assured that Jesus is there.

Gospel Reflection

One image that this gospel might subtly conjure up is that of a flock of dumb animals who mindlessly follow whoever herds them. This is not the intended meaning, that is, the disciples of Jesus are basically dumb sheep, easily led by deception. But *is* the gospel implying this? The metaphor falters when we notice that it emphasizes the intimate knowledge the sheep have for the shepherd and vice versa (10:14). In the vocabulary of the Bible, "to know" another oftentimes refers to sexual intimacy. Moreover, the intimacy of Jesus and "his own" reflects the relationship he has with the Father (10:15). It is an intimacy that is expressed ultimately in loving self-surrender, even unto death.

There is a kind of domino effect in the Gospel of John. First, God pours out the divine self in love through the gift of the Word made flesh (1:14, 3:16), a self-surrender that is replicated in Jesus' gift of self for those who are his own (10:15). This same action is what is asked of his followers, most especially those in leadership (15:13). The image of shepherd is used a number of times in the Scriptures to characterize a leader of the people. God is depicted as the Shepherd of Israel (see Gen 49:24; Ps 23:1; 78:52-53). And it's surely not accidental or irrelevant that Moses and David were both actual shepherds before each was called to lead the people of Israel.

When Israel's leaders were not tending to the needs of the people, they were denounced for being absent and stupid shepherds, who scattered the flock (see 1 Kgs 22:17; Jer 10:21; 23:1-2; Ezek 34:5-6). By contrast, Jesus is the "model" (the Greek word here is *kalos*, meaning "good," "beautiful," "exemplary") shepherd, who gathers all together into one, giving his very life for his own. We replicate this kind of shepherding not by actively seeking suffering but by putting love at the center: God's love made visible in Jesus, Jesus' love made manifest in us. It is a love that is freely chosen by an empowered self, with a willingness to go the depths of calamity if necessary. This requires not blind following but intimate knowledge of the model Shepherd and the free choice to continue his work of gathering all the disparate into one.

Today is a good day to ask ourselves: How does intimacy with Christ, the Good Shepherd empowers me to replicate his loving self-surrender for those who are "his own"? What image in my own culture conveys what shepherds did in Jesus' culture? Spending some time in prayer with that image might be a creative and fruitful way of reflecting on this gospel reading.

Old/New Testament and CCC links

First Reading — Acts 4:8-12

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said: "Leaders of the people and elders: If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a cripple, namely, by what means he was saved, then all of you and all the people of Israel should know that it was in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead; in his name this man stands before you healed. He is the stone rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved."

Responsorial Psalm — Ps 4:2, 4, 7-8, 9

(R): The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes. **(R)**

I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me and have been my savior. The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. By the Lord has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes. **(R)**

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; we bless you from the house of the Lord. I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me and have been my savior. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his kindness endures forever. **(R)**

Second Reading — 1 John 3:1-2

Beloved: See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Sharing and Discussion

1. “¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice.” Who is Jesus referring to? and why is he concern for them?
2. What helps you listen to his voice?
3. What new thing have you learned about Jesus from this passage?

Closing Prayer

All: Protector and creator of all, by the care of your Son we have come to know the fullness of life. Hear our prayers that your sheepfold may join together for the building up of your kingdom. We ask this through Christ our risen Lord. Amen.

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

All: Amen