

Your Lourdes Sunday Liturgy at Home

Fourth Sunday of Easter – Good Shepherd Sunday

May 3, 2020

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is traditionally “Good Shepherd Sunday,” and each year we read selections from the 10th chapter of John’s Gospel. This year, we get John 10:1-10, but the title of this feast doesn’t show up until verse 11 – “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.”

Shepherding was so much a part of the fabric of daily life 2000 years ago that the image was used frequently for both God and Israel’s leaders. God was described as the attentive shepherd caring for his sheep. Israel’s leaders were either labeled as shepherds who were just and compassionate or as shepherds who scattered and destroyed.

The 23rd Psalm – “The Lord is my shepherd...” – is undoubtedly the most sung, most read, most comforting and most beloved passages of Scripture. But for many of us, who today are neither herders nor farmers, the image of the Shepherd is not as vivid and potent as it was in Jesus’ day. Then, when you add “Good” to Shepherd, you add a dimension that we post-modern, post-industrial folk miss entirely.

In Jesus’ day, a “good” shepherd was thought by city folk to be an impossibility, an unlikelihood, an unimaginable occurrence. (The same shock happened to listeners who first heard Jesus say the Good Samaritan.) Shepherds might be good at tending sheep, but they weren’t regarded as morally good. They were nomadic people, drifting in and out of towns. They were prime suspects if a chicken went missing from a coop or yard. They were viewed as irreverent and unobservant in religion: they didn’t wash their hands a lot, much less bathe. They didn’t attend services regularly. In some regions of our world today, nomadic herders meet with the same distrust. The Fula people of West Africa, the Tuareg of North and West Africa, and the Saami in Scandinavia are modern day peoples raising suspicious eyebrows of town folk while migrating with their herds.

Yet in Chapter 10 of John, Jesus sings of the Good Shepherd. He identifies with that ideal protector and sentinel. We are reminded of other good shepherds in the Bible: the young David, before he became king, watched his father's herds (1 Samuel 16:11); the exiled Moses, before returning to Egypt to liberate the Hebrew people, tended the flocks of his father-in-law Jethro (Exodus 2:15 – 3:3); shepherds watching their flocks by night were informed by an angel choir of the birth of the messiah (Luke 2:13-14).

This passage from John (10:1-10) actually refers to Christ as the gate as much as the shepherd. John presents the idea of Jesus as Good Shepherd and gate immediately after the story of the man born blind. That emphasizes Christ as the entrance gate for the one who was driven out of the community and as the shepherd who defies the robbers while protecting the defenseless.

The audience of leaders who had debated with the once-blind man is the same group that hears Jesus talking about the brigands who try to enter the sheepfold from illegitimate positions. As John has built up to this incident near the end of Jesus' active ministry, the tensions have grown between Jesus and the religious leaders and he has not held back in his critique of them. Now he contrasts the sort of pastor who expels the blind man with the one who calls his own by name, knows them and is therefore the only one they will follow.

One key that brings together the roles of Jesus as the gateway into safety and as the shepherd who cares for the sheep is that both focus on the good, the wellbeing of the sheep. The conclusion of today's reading summarizes the point of it all as Jesus says, "I came that they might have life and have it more abundantly." When we hear that statement in light of the other readings we realize that as we receive the gift of his abundant life, our most genuine response will be to share it with everyone.

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Greeting: In the name of the Father, † and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.

Assembly: Amen

Lord Jesus, you identify yourself as the gate for the sheepfold:

Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you are the Good Shepherd whose voice conveys life:

Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you call us to follow you that we might have life:

Lord, have mercy.

Opening Prayer:

O God,

you never cease to call even those far away,

for it is your will

that all be drawn into one-fold.

Attune our ears to the voice of the Good Shepherd,

who leads us always to you,

that we may find under your tender protection

life in all its fullness.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, the resurrection and the life,

who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

God for ever and ever.

Let the church say – Amen.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles (*Acts 2:14a, 36 - 41*)

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed: "Let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, "What are we to do, my brothers?" Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is made to you and to your children and to all those far off, whomever the Lord our God will call." He testified with many other arguments, and was exhorting them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand persons were added that day.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (23)

r. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
In verdant pastures he gives me repose;
beside restful waters he leads me;
he refreshes my soul.

r. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

He guides me in right paths
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk in the dark valley
I fear no evil; for you are at my side
with your rod and your staff
that give me courage.

r. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

You spread the table before me
in the sight of my foes;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

r. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Only goodness and kindness follow me
all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
for years to come.

r. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Peter (*Peter 2:20b – 25*)

Beloved: If you are patient when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps. ***He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.***

When he was insulted, he returned no insult; when he suffered, he did not threaten; instead, he handed himself over to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you had gone astray like sheep, but you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (*John 10:14*)

I am the good shepherd, says the Lord;
I know my sheep, and mine know me.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John (*John 10:1 – 10*)

Jesus said: “Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber. But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice, as the shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice. But they will not follow a stranger; they will run away from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers.” Although Jesus used this figure of speech, the Pharisees did not realize what he was trying to tell them.

So, Jesus said again, “Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved and will come in

and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.”

The Gospel of the Lord

Reflection Prompts

1. How do you respond to the biblical imagery of sheep and shepherds? Is it helpful? Is it inviting? Or does it put you off? Why?
2. In today’s Gospel, Jesus speaks of himself as the door or gateway that leads to the most desirable gifts. What is the “open door” that Jesus is inviting you to go through at the present time?
3. What form does coming in and going out of Jesus-the-gate take in your life?
4. Have you tried to climb in another way?
5. The 23rd Psalm offers the image of the shepherding God who refreshes our souls and encourages us. What are your connections and reactions to this oft proclaimed psalm?

Let the discussion wind down and come to a close. Then you could listen to The Rev. Milton Brunson & the Thompson Community Singers in a 1986 presentation of “Safe in his Arms,” a choral version of the 23rd Psalm:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i6IDRc8hZYA>

Then after a brief period of centering silence, move into the intercessions followed by singing or reciting the Lord’s Prayer.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS – May 3, 2020
FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER – GOOD SHEPHERD

Leader: God invites us to let Jesus shepherd us on the paths of life. Let us pray for the needs of all those on the journey with us.

Reader:

1. For the church: that it be a model of non-violence in our world. We pray: **Shepherd us, O God.** (RESPOND: **Shepherd us, O God.**)
2. For victims of war and violence, especially refugees, women and children, and for those offering safe haven to the vulnerable. We pray: **Shepherd us, O God.**
3. For safety and wisdom for all those who attend to those in peril world over, such as staff of Doctors without Borders and the Centers for Disease Control. We pray: **Shepherd us, O God.**
4. For a renewed spirit of global cooperation to flower to address challenges like the spread of the Covid-19 virus, climate change, nuclear arms, and world hunger. We pray: **Shepherd us, O God.**
5. For our Muslim sisters and brothers as they observe the holy month of Ramadan, that Islamic faith will come to be better understood by people of other faiths, through interfaith dialogue. We pray: **Shepherd us, O God.**
6. For all those 30 million plus who are unemployed as well as those who are underemployed or underpaid, that they find the work they seek and be paid a living wage. We pray: **Shepherd us, O God.**
7. For all who seek healing from substance use disorders and mental health issues, that they find help and mutual support. We pray: **Shepherd us, O God.**
8. For our newly appointed Archbishop Gregory Hartmayer as he is installed this week, that he may be granted hope, vision and compassion to lead the church of Atlanta. We pray: **Shepherd us, O God.**
9. For all those who are detained and all those who work in our prisons and immigration jails, that they be protected from the pandemic. We pray: **Shepherd us, O God.**

10. For all those who are separated from us by infirmity, especially those afflicted by the corona-virus, and for all those living with HIV and AIDS, that they know our community's care for them. We pray: **Shepherd us, O God.**
11. For all the dead, those who have fallen victim to the corona-virus and all those who died since last Easter — that God may bring them to a haven of rest and peace, especially Sterling “Yak” Fleury for whom this Mass is being celebrated. We pray: **Shepherd us, O God.**
12. Please share any intention you have [PAUSE.....] as well as all our own needs. We pray: **Shepherd us, O God.**

Leader: God who leads, protects and beckons us, we pray for open ears to hear your voice in new ways. Show us how to be open to the call of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who comes to give us life. We ask this in his holy name. LET THE CHURCH SAY.....AMEN!

Lord's Prayer

Closing Prayer

Protect with loving-kindness, Lord, the people you have renewed through the paschal mystery of Christ and grant them this reward: the resurrection of the body to glory everlasting. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let the Church say: AMEN

I Want to be a Follower of Christ

by J.W. Harris

I want to be a follower of Christ,
I want to be one of his disciples.
I want to live in the newness of life,
Just let me be a follower of Christ.

What do I have to do?
What do I have to say?
How do I have to walk each and ev'ry day?
Tell me what does it cost if I carry the cross?

Just let me be a follower of Christ.