



Welcome to our Eucharistic Celebration

The Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 22, 2018

Saint Mary of the Assumption Parish

Today's Themes in Scripture

After the Resurrection of Jesus, his disciples began to understand who Jesus was and all that had been accomplished through his life, death, and resurrection. After Peter had been arrested for healing a cripple, he fearlessly proclaimed that Jesus is the Christ. Filled with the Holy Spirit, he used the prophetic words of Psalm 118 to address the leaders and people of Israel, telling them that Jesus is the cornerstone, the foundation of God's plan of salvation. Now that God had raised him from the dead, the disciples continued to spread his life-giving gospel. Peter asserted that the power to heal and the power to find salvation is found only in Jesus' name.

In today's second reading, St. John tells his audience that they have a new identity in Christ; they are now the children of God. Even though the world around them cannot appreciate who they have become, they are known to God as his children. John assures them that they will one day see their Father and will be transformed to be like him.

On every fourth Sunday of Easter, the Church proclaims Jesus as the Good Shepherd. During his lifetime, Jesus revealed his divinity using the words "I am:" the name God uses for himself. In John's Gospel, when Jesus says "I am the Good Shepherd," he further reveals himself to be the One promised by God through the Prophets. Every Jewish listener would have remembered the words of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah in which God promised to send a shepherd that would gather his people and lovingly care for them. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus exceeds all expectations. He does not shepherd like someone for whom it is a job or obligation. Instead, he is a shepherd who loves his flock. He will have an intimate relationship with each one of them ("I know mine and mine know me"). He promises that his love will even cause him to lay down his life for them. His mission as savior and shepherd is for everyone, as he invites all people to come into the fold of God's new covenant of salvation.

Sunday Readings and Backgrounds

Reading I: Acts 4:8-12

Jesus has become our cornerstone!

- The reading from the Acts of the Apostles follows the story of the arrest of Peter and John and includes Peter's speech to the authorities who are interrogating them.
- Peter restates the basic truth of the resurrection: Death is conquered and life won through the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.
- The authorities release Peter and John, who immediately return to preaching the good news.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 118: 1, 8-9, 21-23, 26, 28, 29

The stone that the builders rejected has become our cornerstone.

Reading II: 1 John 3:1-2

We shall be like him: light!

- The reading from the First Letter of John is another description of the relationship between God and people.
- God has made us children through and with Christ.
- Because we are God's children, then, we must be like God.

Gospel: John 10:11-18

Jesus is our good shepherd.

- In the gospel passage, Jesus describes three traits of an ideal shepherd.
- These traits also characterize Jesus' relationship to his followers.
- Jesus calls his sheep by name, and they follow wherever he leads.

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BECAUSE I AM, AND YOU ARE MINE

When we were children, one single proclamation was all that was needed to bring a definitive end to any debate about what should be done or to answer any child's whining question, "Why?" That statement was simply: "Because I am Mother." Mom's declaration communicated a degree of authority that required no further explanation.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus makes seven famous statements beginning with the words "I am." Each of them reflects something said about God in the Hebrew Scriptures. Yet, of them all, Jesus' statement "I am the good shepherd" is the only one in which he describes himself with a human role. When Jesus spoke of himself as bread, light, resurrection, etc., those descriptions indicated what he offers humankind. When he said, "I am the good shepherd," he moved into the realm of his own costly freedom and his mutual relationships with his Father and his followers.

When Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd he is telling us a lot more than the typical picture that we might perceive of him amid the flock or with a lamb on his shoulders. First of all, in today's selection we hear Jesus repeat five times that he lays down his life for his sheep. Each time this is stated, he emphasizes the fact that it is his choice to do so. He doesn't just risk his life or even lose his life, he says he lays it down: His entire life is for them. Except for blessing the bread as his body given for his own, Jesus never explained his dedication to his flock more clearly. In this, he is not only the model shepherd, but the model human being who has discovered the purpose of his life and chooses to fulfill it without reservation.

Sandwiched in the midst of his five statements in which he offers his life for his own, Jesus describes the heart of his relationship with them saying, "I know mine and mine know me." Explaining the depth of what he means, Jesus compares his relationship with his own to his relationship with his Father. That sort of knowing involves an intimate sharing of life and of such love that the parties come to understand each other from the inside, becoming freely and inextricably bound to one another. Jesus explains that he has chosen to have an insider's knowledge of his own and offers the same to them.

Before anyone makes a claim to the exclusivity of their tribe or flock's participation in God's love, Jesus says that he has other sheep in other folds who share the same relationship with him. When he says that they will follow and all will become one flock, he is giving a subtle but pointed warning to any who would try to set the boundary lines. He tells people who pride themselves on being his own — both in his day and in ours — that he is the shepherd. Membership in his flock depends only on hearing and following his voice; it can't be defined by rituals or formal membership in any special group. When Jesus said "I am the good shepherd," he used the language of his tradition to proclaim not only that he had freely chosen the course of his life, but also that he was a faithful reflection of God, the Father of all. His self-description as the good shepherd summarizes Christian theology; it tells us the purpose of creation and the Incarnation was to bring all into one in God.

Where does this leave us? How are we to determine which voices speak for the shepherd? How are we to discern who is leading us toward God? That's where Jesus' description of mercenaries and wolves comes in. The hired herder's first concern is personal comfort and safety — we might see prestige and profit as additional expressions of that. Mercenaries consistently choose themselves and their own kind, seemingly unwilling or unable to accept or comprehend the concept of one flock composed of diverse folds.

The wolves, too, are recognizable by their priorities. They specialize in fear and division. They possess the powers of strength and stealth and prey on the weak. While a relationship with the good shepherd is characterized by ever-increasing knowing and being known, wolves specialize in lies and disguise (as Little Red Riding Hood would tell us) all for the purpose of eating up their victims.

Many voices claim to tell us what should be done and why. Jesus claimed the authority of being the Good Shepherd who gave everything to bring humanity to the goal of sharing divine life.

We can always recognize his voice in those that call us into love and freedom and ever-broader solidarity. If we ask "Why?" his simple answer might be, "Because you are mine."