

April 22, 2018
4th Sunday of Easter
John 10:11-18

I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them. This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep.

I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd. This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again. This command I have received from my Father."

Background:

The fourth Sunday of Easter is often called "Good Shepherd Sunday." On this Sunday, in each year of the three-year cycle, the gospel reading is taken from the tenth chapter of John's gospel, where Jesus draws on the image of a good shepherd in his teaching. The Jewish Christian community would have been familiar with shepherds of the day, and familiar as well with the use of this image in their religious teaching, in places like Psalm 23 and the prophet Ezekiel.

The gospel text for today is composed of two statements, each of which begins with the sentence: "I am the good shepherd." In the first statement, Jesus portrays himself as a shepherd who takes his commitment to care for his sheep so seriously that he is willing to put his own life. Shepherds of the day were viewed as people who lacked moral responsibility. That Jesus would call himself a good shepherd would have drawn the attention of those who were listening.

Jesus' second statement uses the image of the shepherd to describe a Christology, the relationship of God to the world in and through the second person of the Trinity. The shepherd is described as having a special and intimate relationship with God, which is extended, through him, to the sheep and beyond. His shepherding reaches beyond his fold to those that belong to other folds. These others also recognize his voice and follow him, becoming part of the "one fold." He does not do this on his own, but because he is faithful to the will of God.

Shepherds of the day would often secure their sheep in a common pen for the night. In the early hours of the morning they would call to their sheep and lead them to pasture. If a shepherd was able to fool a sheep from a different fold into following him, that unfortunate sheep would be slaughtered by the deceitful shepherd. Therefore, Jesus is using the image of a shepherd in a way that would be surprising to the people of the day. He is the shepherd who purposefully calls not only the sheep of his flock, but other flocks as well, not to destroy and take advantage of them, but to give them life.

Reflection Questions:

1. Who in contemporary society would you cast in a similar light as a shepherd in Jesus' day? What would Jesus be saying to you if he called himself a good _____?
2. Who are some people who risk their personal safety to protect others from danger? Who do you know personally?
3. Have you ever been in a situation where you put your well-being or reputation at risk to respond to the needs of another?
4. Would it be easier for you to live your life taking on possible personal bodily harm, or giving of yourself over the daily care of a person with special needs?

5. Who do you think Jesus was talking about when he said that he has other sheep not of this fold?
6. In the second portion of this gospel, Jesus talks about his relationship to the Father and to the flock. What qualities of that relationship stand out to you?
7. Can you take time to talk to God about your response to those qualities of God's relationship to you, or the image of Jesus as a good shepherd, or some other thought that arose in you as you prayed with this text?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

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Excerpts from the readings for April 22, 2018, the Fourth Sunday of Easter

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."

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.
I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me and have been my savior.
By the Lord has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes.
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.

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.

Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them. This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd. This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again. This command I have received from my Father."

Excerpts from Acts 4:8-12; Psalm 118:1, 8-9, 21-23, 26, 28, 29; 1 John 3:1-2; and John 10:11-18