

May 12, 2019
4th Sunday of Easter
John 10:27-30

“My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father’s hand. The Father and I are one.”

Background:

This short text presents the ideal image of both Jesus’ relationship to His Father and His relationship to His followers. From the text itself, the reader would not be aware of the turmoil that surrounds this short passage. The Jews have asked Jesus repeatedly to clarify who he is. At other points in John’s Gospel, he has spoken of himself as: bread for the world (Jn 6:35), the light of the world (Jn 9:5), and the good shepherd (Jn 10:11).

Jesus has also performed some miracles. He has changed a large amount of water into wine (Jn 2:1-12), fed a multitude with five loaves (Jn 6:1-15), and cured a number of people including a man who was blind from birth (Jn 9:1-41).

He has also done some things that would be unthinkable to the people of his day. These include driving out of the temple area those who were selling items used as sacrificial offerings (2:13-17); engaging a Samaritan woman in conversation (4:4-42); and refusing to condemn a woman who was caught in the act of adultery (8:1-11).

In the early part of his gospel, John portrays Jesus’ ministry as being a center of controversy. As early as the end of the second chapter, John states that Jesus needed no one to give him testimony about human nature. He was well aware of what was in each person’s heart (Jn 2:25). In chapter 5, John states that there were Jews who wanted to kill Jesus (Jn 5:18). The things that Jesus had said and done were troubling for the Jewish leaders.

Immediately preceding this text, the community leaders approach Jesus and ask him to tell them plainly if he is the Messiah. (Jn 10:24) This is the third time in John’s gospel they have made this request. Following the short text of today’s Gospel, the Jewish leaders again reach for rocks to hurl at Jesus. (Jn 10:31) This is the second time they try to stone him.

Jesus uses the images of sheep and shepherd to describe his relationship with his true followers. Sheep were held in high esteem in this culture because they did not cry out in pain but quietly accepted their fate. When a male child reached puberty, he left the care of his mother and the community of women and of his household, and he entered the male-based society under the care of his father. His father and the other men of the community were responsible to teach him the qualities necessary for an adult male in their society. The boys/young men were expected to faithfully and without complaint carry out the tasks given them. Physical pain and punishment were essential elements to develop the toughness needed for daily life. They were to be like sheep, who, when they were sheared each spring and eventually slaughtered, seemed to submit to their fate without bleating. Because of this quality, sheep were seen as symbols of the ideal son.

The shepherd at the time of Jesus was a mixed image. In the past, the Jews had used the image of the shepherd to describe their relationship to God and the ideal ruler. Psalm 23, which is used at many contemporary funerals, begins, “The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want.” Psalm 80 begins, “Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who led Joseph like a flock.” The prophet Isaiah describes the messiah as one who “... will feed his flock like a Shepherd; He will gather the lambs in his arms, and will carry them in his bosom; and gently lead those that are with young.” (Is 40:11) In the time of Jesus, shepherds had lost their status because they did not respect the property of others. They allowed their sheep to graze on land belonging to other shepherds, and they would entice sheep not of their flock to follow them by imitating the voice or call of another shepherd. Also they were not able to keep ritualistically pure, and they were not at home to protect the women and children, a major responsibility of men. Jesus uses these familiar symbols, meaningful to the people of his day, to describe himself as the Good Shepherd, and to describe his relationship to God and his relationship to his disciples.

Reflection Questions:

1. A time in my life when I most would have enjoyed hearing a familiar voice was...

2. Can you recall what it was like for you when your child first began to respond to the sound of your voice?
3. When I think of sheep...
4. If Jesus were going to liken me to an animal, I would prefer..., because...
5. If I were to imagine God calling to me, his voice would be...
6. Jesus says in this gospel that he has given eternal life to those who follow him. When I think of having been given eternal life by God...
7. When I think of God speaking to me...
8. Can you take some time now to talk with God honestly and openly about whatever struck you in this gospel?

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. Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fsc-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted. Excerpts from the Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this text may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Please include this information when printing or forwarding.

Excerpts from the readings for May 12, 2019, the Fourth Sunday of Easter

Paul and Barnabas continued on from Perga and reached Antioch in Pisidia.

On the sabbath they entered the synagogue and took their seats.

Many Jews and worshipers who were converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to remain faithful to the grace of God.

On the following sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.

When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and with violent abuse contradicted what Paul said. Both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said,

“It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first, but since you reject it and condemn yourselves as unworthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.

For so the Lord has commanded us, I have made you a light to the Gentiles, that you may be an instrument of salvation to the ends of the earth.”

The Gentiles were delighted when they heard this and glorified the word of the Lord.

All who were destined for eternal life came to believe, and the word of the Lord continued to spread through the whole region. The Jews, however, incited the women of prominence who were worshipers and the leading men of the city, stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their territory. So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them, and went to Iconium. The disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

*We are his people, the sheep of his flock. Sing joyfully to the Lord, all you lands;
serve the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful song.*

Know that the Lord is God; he made us, his we are; his people, the flock he tends.

The Lord is good: his kindness endures forever, and his faithfulness, to all generations.

I, John, had a vision of a great multitude, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands.

Then one of the elders said to me, "These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

"For this reason they stand before God's throne and worship him day and night in his temple.

The one who sits on the throne will shelter them. They will not hunger or thirst anymore, nor will the sun or any heat strike them. For the Lamb who is in the center of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to springs of life-giving water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Jesus said: "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand.

My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

Excerpts from Acts 13:14, 43-52; Psalm 100:1-3, 5; Revelation 7:9, 14-17; and John 10:27-30