

May 3, 2020 - 4th Sunday of Easter (Good Shepherd Sunday)

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 he 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, they 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.

Background:

This text is made up of two parables and an interpretation of those parables that identify Jesus as the gate and the shepherd. The text itself follows John's account of Jesus' cure of the man who was born blind. (John 9:1-41) As John unfolds Jesus' cure of the blind man, the relationships between the Pharisees and both Jesus and the blind man deteriorate. Toward the end of that passage, Jesus says that he came into the world so that those who were blind might see and those who see might become blind. The Pharisees confront Jesus' suggestion that they are blind. He responds, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, 'We see,' so your sin remains." (John 9:41) The placement of today's gospel text immediately after this encounter should influence how we hear today's gospel. The two brief analogies of today's gospel speak of the quality of leadership that Jesus offers his followers. They also shed light on the kind of leadership that is authentic to Jesus' model and that which is contrary to that model.

In the gospel for today, Jesus draws on two familiar roles of the day--that of shepherd and that of the keeper of the sheep gate. In Jesus' day, most often sheep were kept in a common pen at the edge of the village. The gatekeeper knew which sheep were part of each family's flock. Each shepherd would use a distinctive call to call his sheep from the common pen. Most often once out of the pen the shepherd would then drive his small flock to pasture, taking up the rear so that he could watch for stragglers. But there were those who would lead their sheep with a kind of whistle or a call that the sheep recognized and followed. In the parable, Jesus takes this latter style and carries it yet another step, indicating that this shepherd's relationship is so familiar that he calls each by name and his sheep know the sound of his voice. Jesus is that kind a shepherd.

The second parable in today's gospel draws on the role of the one who keeps the sheep while they are held in the pen. He guards the sheep from being taken by wild animals or from someone who would take advantage of them for their own profit. In this situation, the person tending the sheep might lie down across the opening in the pen so anyone that would go in or out of the pan must pass over him.

Jesus uses these two everyday experiences of people of his day to teach about the quality of care they should expect for themselves. John portrays Jesus as the good shepherd and likens the Pharisees to those who do not have a compassionate relationship with the sheep and might even take advantage of them. The Pharisees were unable to help the man born blind, and went so far as ostracizing him from the community when he did not conform to expectations. Jesus, on the other hand, first responds to the man's need, and then he seeks him out when he is left to live a life isolated from the religious community and his family. Jesus tends to his disciples like a good shepherd who even lays down this life in order that they may be kept from all who would cause them death or harm.

Reflection Questions:

1. What are some of the things that come to mind when you think of sheep?
2. Who are the people whose voice you recognize even without seeing them? What are some of the qualities of the relationships you have with those people?
3. What voices are you hearing during this pandemic?
4. What do you look for in leaders--in religious, political, and organizational leaders?
5. How familiar are you with the voice of God in your life? In what ways does God speak to you?
6. Have there been people who have helped you discern the voice of God from the many voices you hear each day?
7. Can you take some time now to talk honestly about what is going on within you during the pandemic, the different voices that seem to be calling to you, and how you would like to respond to those different voices? Or maybe you would like to talk to God about the kind of voice you would like to be during these days and ask for guidance or assistance?

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 May 3, 2020, the Fourth Sunday of Easter

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed:

"Let the house of Israel know 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; you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is made to you and to your children and to all those far off, whomever the Lord will call." He testified with other arguments, exhorting them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added that day.

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

In verdant pastures he gives me repose; beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul.

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.

You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes;

you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
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.

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 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.

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Excerpts from Acts 2:14A, 36-41; Psalm 23: 1-6; 1 Peter 2:20-25; and John 10:1-10