

May 8, 2022
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 an image of Jesus’ relationship to his Father and Jesus’ relationship with his followers. From the text itself, the reader would not be aware of the turmoil that surrounds this short passage. As Jesus taught about his relationship to God, he used a variety of images. At different points in John’s gospel, Jesus 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). The Jews have asked Jesus repeatedly to clarify who he is and what is his relationship to God.

Jesus has also performed some miraculous acts. 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 for the people of his day. These include: driving out those selling items needed for sacrificial offerings in the temple (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 the 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 gospel 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 have tried to stone him.

Jesus uses the image 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 the women, 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 to be an adult male in their society. Physical pain and punishment were essential elements to develop the toughness needed for daily life. The young boys/men were expected to faithfully and without complaint carry out the tasks given them. They were to be like sheep, who, when they were sheared each spring and eventually slaughtered, would submit to their fate without bleating. Because of this quality, sheep became symbolic of the ideal way to live.

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). By the time of Jesus, shepherds had lost their status. Many allowed their sheep to graze on land belonging to other shepherds, and they would entice sheep not of their own 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. He lives faithfully the qualities of a shepherd who gives of himself tirelessly to care for the sheep entrusted to his care. Jesus uses the ideal image of a shepherd to describe his relationship to God and his relationship to his disciples.

Reflection Questions:

1. Are there people you know who have the qualities of a “good shepherd?”
2. Are there voices of people that you can pick out instantly?
3. Are there people who know the sound of your voice?
4. What do you associate with sheep?
5. If someone said that you remind them of sheep or a shepherd, what kind of thought would arise within you?
6. If someone was going to liken me to an animal, I would prefer..., because... .
7. I think if God were to call my name, I would....
8. Jesus says in this gospel that he has given eternal life to those who follow him. How do you respond to this statement in today’s gospel?
9. Can you take some time now to talk with God 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 fr.paul.gallagher.ofm@gmail.com.

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-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.

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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 100:1-5; Revelation 7:9, 14-17; and John 10:27-30

From Joe:

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for May 8th, the Fourth Sunday of Easter, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The Gospel is a short selection from John, four verses that come at the end of his greater Good Shepherd discourse. "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life. No one can take them out of my hand."

The other readings also have references to the Lord as the shepherd and the source of eternal life. In the first reading from Acts, Paul and Barnabas told the Jews, "'Since you reject the word of God and condemn yourselves as unworthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.' And the Gentiles who were destined for eternal life came to believe, and the word continued to spread." Psalm 100 proclaims, "The Lord God made us; we are his people, the flock he tends." In the second reading, from Revelation, John says, "I saw a multitude from every nation before the Lamb on the throne, their robes made white in the blood of the Lamb. The Lamb will shepherd them and lead them to springs of life-giving water."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!

*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."
Acts 13:47*