

April 30, 2023
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:

The fourth Sunday after Easter is traditionally Good Shepherd Sunday. On the Fourth Sunday of Easter in all three cycles of the year, the Gospel is taken from the tenth chapter of John's Gospel, known as the Good Shepherd Discourse. Often communities of ancient Israel would have had enclosures at the perimeters of the villages where the community's sheep were kept and protected. One person would guard this common pen until each shepherd would arrive to gather his flock.

Because the experience of shepherding was so common in ancient Israel, it became a common tool for understanding God's relationship to the people. The good shepherd, like Moses and David, is described as one who is faithful to his duty of protecting his flock. Israel also had bad leaders and prophets who led the people into false worship or exploited the people; these were described as false shepherds (Ezekiel 34). This familiar image is used by John in the tenth chapter of his Gospel to help describe Jesus' relationship, in contrast to the Scribes and Pharisees' relationship to the people.

The Gospel text is composed of two parables and an interpretation of those parables that identifies 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)

In the Gospel 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. It was the responsibility of the gatekeeper to protect the flock at night from those who might steal or harm the sheep.

The second parable draws on the role of the shepherd as the one who leads and protects the sheep while they are in the pasture. The description is not of a shepherd who comes behind the sheep and drives them to right pasture, but one who leads them and calls to them. The sheep know the sound of his voice and they willingly follow. This style of leadership implies a more intimate relationship between the shepherd and the sheep.

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 to ostracize 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 community. Jesus tends to his disciples like a good shepherd who even lays down his 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. Who are the voices competing for your attention in your everyday world? How do those people treat the blind, the misfit, and lost sheep of your community?
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 with God 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

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 April 30, 2023, 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.

Jesus said: "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 the shepherd 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, the Pharisees did not realize what he was trying to tell them.
So Jesus said again, "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 to steal and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly."

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

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for April 30th, the Fourth Sunday of Easter, as
prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The Gospel is from the beginning of John's
chapter 10, sometimes called the Good Shepherd discourse. Jesus tells how the shepherd enters the sheepfold
through the gate, and the sheep hear the shepherd's voice and follow him. The sheep will not follow a stranger,
but run away from him instead. "I am the gate for the sheep. The sheep did not listen to the thieves and robbers
who came before me. The thief comes to steal and slaughter and destroy. I came so they might have life, and
have it more abundantly."

The other readings also have references to Jesus being the shepherd, rightly guiding and saving the souls of
those who answer his call. In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Peter tells the Israelites in
Jerusalem, "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will
receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is made to whomever the Lord our God will call." Psalm 23
exclaims, "The Lord is my shepherd; he guides me in right paths, he refreshes my soul." In the second reading,
from Peter's first letter, he writes, "You had gone astray like sheep, but you have now returned to the shepherd
and guardian of your souls. To this you have been called; follow in his footsteps."

Today again, like throughout this Season of Easter, the first and second readings tell of conditions in the earliest
days of the church under Peter, and the earliest growth of the church, mostly through the conversion of Jews. At

the end of today's first reading from Acts, "Those who accepted Peter's message were baptized, and about three thousand persons were added that day." May the joy of Easter remain with you! May you recognize God in the people you live and work and interact with, and may they recognize Him in you.

Joe

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