

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

John 10:14

R⁷. Alleluia, alleluia.

I am the good shepherd, says the Lord;

I know my sheep, and mine know me.

R⁷. Alleluia, alleluia.



Gospel

John 10:27-30; L51C

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.”

Reflecting on the Gospel

Though we are in Cycle C (the Gospel of Luke), today we have another reading from the Gospel of John. Each week since Easter we have read from this gospel. Today we read not about a resurrection appearance but instead we hear about the familiar, comforting image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. We are his sheep who hear his voice and respond by following him. Of course, to follow means to be a disciple, so the image of a shepherd and his sheep is especially apt.

Pope Francis seems to find this image instructive as well. He speaks of the role of bishops and priests to be shepherds (for that is the meaning of the Latin term *pastor*). Pope Francis says that the shepherd must have the “smell of the sheep.” Such an image is certainly vivid, graphic, and leaves little to the imagination. It conjures up one who is uncomfortably close to the sheep. But that is essentially the model of the Good Shepherd, and one to be emulated by those who serve.

Not only do we follow the Good Shepherd upon hearing his voice, but we learn that the Good Shepherd gives eternal life.

The symbolism is profound and perhaps even more so because the snippet we read today is so short. The meaning of the words should not be lost in their brevity. The relationship of the sheep to the shepherd is dependent upon the Father and Jesus. The Father has given the sheep to Jesus. No one can take them from the Father or the Son, for the Father and the Son are one. Again, the theological sophistication and the high Christology are worthy of meditation.

Given the symbolism, the task of the sheep is pure and simple, to follow Jesus, to be a disciple. The task of the Father and the Son is not to lose the sheep, or perhaps not to give them up to those who might try to pry open their hands.

Our task, therefore, is no more difficult than following Jesus. To do that we must be attentive to his voice.

Living the Paschal Mystery

It would be easy to follow Jesus if he were physically present here upon the earth, healing the sick and curing the lame. Who wouldn’t leave everything to do that? But it’s much more difficult to be attentive to the voice of Jesus after the resurrection. And that is precisely what this gospel passage requires of us. We are to listen closely amidst the noise and sound of our world and discern the voice of the Good Shepherd. What is he calling us to do? Where does he want us to go? We would like to follow him, but how to hear his voice?

When we speak do we sound more like we are echoing the gospel or syndicated TV or radio shows? Are we following Christ, attuned to his voice in Scripture? Or are we more closely attuned to the culture, knowing the voice of the more popular media? How we speak and how we act may tell us more about who we are ultimately following. On this Fourth Sunday of Easter it is good to pause and reflect on our path. Whose voice do we follow?

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: No one can take them out of my hand.

To the point: John’s gospel gives us the beloved image of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who calls his sheep by name and leads them in safety along the pathways of life. In today’s gospel passage we hear only a fraction of Jesus’ discourse on the Good Shepherd, and yet we are told what is most essential, we are united to Jesus in an unbreakable bond of love. Jesus proclaims, “No one can take [my sheep] out of my hand.” In the spiritual life we are called to attune our ears to the voice of our Good Shepherd showing us the way, and to fear not; nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Connecting the Gospel

to the second readings: In the second reading from Revelation we are given a vision of “a great multitude, / which no one could count, / from every nation, race, people, and tongue.” It is revealed that this multitude is comprised of the ones who have “survived the time of great distress” and “washed their robes / and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” The early church encountered grave persecution. From the martyrdom of nearly all of the apostles (tradition tells us only John died of old age on the island of Patmos) to the violent campaigns of the Roman government intent on ending the fledgling religion, many would have cause to doubt Jesus’ statement that “[n]o one can take them out of my hand.” And yet, as the apostle Paul stated in his First Letter to the Corinthians, “O death, where is your victory?” (15:55; NABRE). Our Good Shepherd gives us eternal life. Even death itself cannot separate us from him.

to experience: In joy and in despair we can rely on the voice of the Good Shepherd to lead us.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: Psalm 100 is an invitation to come before the Lord with joy and thanksgiving knowing who we truly are, “[God’s] people, the flock he tends.” This simple psalm speaks to our self-understanding as a community dedicated to the Lord. We are not individuals intent on our own personal salvation, but a group of disciples that listens to the Lord in community and comes before him (together) with joy and thanksgiving. The beautiful diversity of the “multitude” in Revelation reveals this to us. Among them are counted “every nation, race, people, and tongue,” and yet they sing out in one voice to their God. So may we worship, in one voice, unified in our diversity.

to psalmist preparation: Your voice in song calls the community to come before the Lord with joy and to know they are the flock of God. How do you experience and rejoice in your parish community?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

Psalm 100 tells us we are “[God’s] people, the flock he tends.” How is your parish community a unified flock, led by the Good Shepherd? How can you strive to embrace even greater unity?

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How do you listen for the voice of the Good Shepherd in your daily life?

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How is Jesus, the Good Shepherd, calling you to follow him at this moment in your life?

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Good Shepherd Sunday is a traditional time to pray for vocations to serve the church.

What are some ways you can grow in your vocation, whether to marriage, holy orders, religious life, or single life, over the coming year?

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