

Commentary to the 4th Sunday of Easter, -A-

Gospel John 10:1-10



The Fourth Sunday of Easter is also known as Good Shepherd Sunday because on this Sunday we hear the Gospel in which Jesus teaches us about the Good Shepherd. In addition to the Good Shepherd I see two other images that can be looked at, the Lamb of God and the Good Sheep. This gives us three images in the Gospel, the Good Shepherd, the Lamb of God and the Good Sheep.

This passage from John's Gospel takes place when Jesus is in the area of Jerusalem teaching and performing great deeds. He is preparing to celebrate the Jewish Feast of the Dedication of the Temple and gives this teaching after the leaders gave such a difficult time to the man born blind who Jesus healed. He is responding to their leadership that seems less concerned about the welfare of the people (sheep) and more concerned with maintaining their places of honor and control over the people.

Jesus tells the people about the Good Shepherd. His qualities are that of humility and service, and his motive is care for the sheep. The Good Shepherd calls his sheep by name, and his sheep recognize his voice. The Good Shepherd is first and foremost concerned with the welfare of his sheep, even more than his own welfare. It is obvious to us that Jesus is the Good Shepherd and throughout the last two millennia He has been portrayed as holding a sheep in numerous works of art. It is consoling to know the depth of love Christ has for each one of us. He ultimately showed us how deep it is when he put our redemption ahead of his life as he died upon the cross for us.

In addition to looking at Jesus as the Good Shepherd, one can also look at him as one of the sheep. For when the Good Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep he himself became a sheep. At Mass we pray the Lamb of God as part of the Communion rite. The Jewish Passover practice was to sacrifice the Passover lambs on the altar in the temple. These lambs would serve as the main dish of the Passover Dinner. This was an annual sacrifice to recall God delivering the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. On the Cross Jesus is the Passover Lamb. The Lamb of God is slain once and for all for our redemption. Through Jesus death on the cross we are set free from sin and given the opportunity to enter in the glory of his kingdom.

Throughout the Easter Season we celebrate not only the death of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, but also his victory over sin and death. It is this victory we are called to savor during the Easter Season. Christ's victory is our redemption. The Gospel of the Good Shepherd teaches us how to embrace the gift of redemption by hearing and recognizing the voice of the Good Shepherd. There are numerous voices calling us to believe and to practice things that might seem nice, but are not truly of the Lord. We need to tune our ears and hearts into recognizing the voice of truth that comes from Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Just as Jesus is the Good Shepherd, we have the call to be Good Sheep. Men and women who are able to recognize the voice of the Lord and to faithfully follow him.

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