

# FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 2:14, 36-41; 1 Peter 2:20-25; John 10:1-10

*Reflection*

*Fr Tao Pham*

This Sunday is called Good Shepherd Sunday. The Good Shepherd is, of course, Jesus. Every year on this fourth Sunday of Easter, the Gospel comes from the tenth chapter of John's Gospel where the Lord speaks of himself as a shepherd. In the Gospel today, Jesus identifies himself as a sheep gate (the way to God) and makes known that he is the good shepherd who calls his followers (sheep) to recognize his voice (message). The Jewish leaders are hostile toward Jesus, who claims that he does the will of the Father.

**First reading (Acts 2:14, 36-41).** This is the conclusion of Peter's sermon to the Jew assembled in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. The first paragraph gives in a nutshell what the whole sermon is about. Jesus whom they crucified has, by his resurrection, been constituted Lord and Christ. The purpose of the sermon was to make them realise what they had done to Jesus, with a view to getting them to repent and be baptised.

**Second reading (1 Peter 2:20-25).** Addressing slaves, Peter urges them to bear their unjust sufferings with patience as Christ, the Good Shepherd, bore his sufferings for love of us.

Slavery was a fact of life in New Testament times. The New Testament writes do not, as might have been expected, lead a campaign against it. Even if they had wanted to do so, they must have been aware that such a stance could only be judged subversive and would jeopardise the tenuous foothold Christianity was gaining in the world of the day.

Peter's words have a wider application. He singled out slaves only because their burden of suffering was heavier than that of others. Suffering is the lot of all Christians. Christ, the shepherd and guardian of our souls, is the one who gets us through it.

**Gospel (John 10:1-10).** Jesus presents himself as the shepherd of God's flock. The sheepfold was a walled enclosure in a field. At night the sheep of various shepherds were gathered there. There was a gate and a guard. In the morning the shepherds came in by gate their own sheep to pasture.

Unlike some other shepherds who come only to steal the sheep, Jesus has come that the sheep may have abundant life. He leads his sheep out and goes before them as their guide. He calls each by name: there is a close, personal relationship between each Christian and Jesus.

Jesus also describes himself as the gate of the sheepfold. Through him Christians have access to God and the life of God. The image of a caring shepherd is a challenge to all who hold pastoral office.

***Reflection:***

In today's Gospel gives us the opportunity to reflect on Christian leadership. Jesus' words suggest to us that those who will lead the Christian community will be known by their faithfulness to Jesus. The leaders will recognize that Jesus is the gate for all of the sheep and that having a good relationship with Jesus is the primary characteristic of a Christian leader. Jesus' allegory also suggests that faithful Christian leadership requires a good relationship with the community: the shepherd knows his sheep, and they know him. Christian leaders follow the example of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, by being faithful to him and by being a good shepherd.

In the Gospel, Jesus says, ***“My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” (John 10:27)***. Jesus offers a clear contrast among shepherds. This would apply to priests, parents and all of us in our own unique way. The contrast He offers is between the ones who care deeply for those entrusted to their care, and those who are just going through the motions and are more motivated by selfishness than sacrificial love.

Jesus perfectly manifested sacrificial love as the Divine Shepherd. He was willing to go all the way for us, His sheep. He was willing to sacrifice everything. He did not let suffering, persecution, rejection and the like deter Him from His responsibility of caring for us in a total and complete way. It should inspire us, console us and encourage us to know how deep His love for us really is.

This love is seen, also, in the unwavering love of a parent, sibling, or dear friend. When the love one offers us is unwavering, especially in difficult times, this is a great support. And love offered to another like this forges a deep spiritual bond that is stronger than any hardship we may face. No matter what “wolf” comes our way, we must know of the unwavering support of the Divine Shepherd. And when we can see that love made manifest in the unwavering support of others, we are doubly blessed. But the contrast should not be ignored either. Jesus gives the example of “a hired man who is not a shepherd” who sees the wolf coming and runs. It's important to point out how damaging this man is to the people of God. When he runs from his responsibility and gives into selfish motivation, he leaves the flock untended and vulnerable to attack.

We should see in this hired man the temptation we all inevitably face in life. It's hard to stick with it through the hard times. It's hard to be there for those who need us when they need us. It's hard to be faithful in all things and to never shy away in the face of the temptation of fear.

Jesus offers His unwavering love and support to us as our Shepherd, but He also wants us to return this gift to Him by offering this same unwavering commitment to one another.

Reflect, today, how well you imitate the Good Shepherd. Where you are lacking, let Him shepherd you so that you may shepherd others. Run to the Good Shepherd and trust in His perfect love for you. We have Christ as our shepherd—He tells us so himself in today's gospel—and we do not resent being called sheep in this context. There is something guileless about a sheep, and at the same time a lot of foolishness! But with Christ as our shepherd and the "good shepherd" who is sincerely interested in the true welfare of His flock we have reason to rejoice.

The leaders of the Jews, the Pharisees and Sadducees, were false shepherds who tried to prevent the people from following Jesus, but they failed. They then killed the shepherd but in vain. He rose from the dead and His flock increased by the thousands and will keep increasing until time ends.

We surely are fortunate to belong to the sheepfold of Christ—His Church. We surely are blessed to have the Son of God as our Shepherd, who came among us in order to lead us to heaven. In the Gospel Jesus says, *"I came so that you may have life and have it to the full."* This is wonderful news. It means that God wants us to live life, and live it to the full. Mere existence is not enough for us. We are summoned to the fullness of life.

Life is generous to those who seize it with both hands. Those who live fully and intensely will not feel cheated at death. Thoreau says, "Fear not that your life will end; fear, rather, that it may never have begun." In the past the Christian religion tended to be identified with restrictions and prohibitions. Many of us were brought up on a theology of detachment from the world. This present life was viewed as nothing more than a time of trial. Life was something to be survived rather than lived. That kind of spirituality discouraged enjoyment of life.

But the message of today's Gospel is this: God wants us to have a full and fruitful life here on earth, and eternal life in the hereafter. To live fully is not the same as to live it up. Which means to grasp all the pleasures for oneself that one can. It is possible to enjoy life to the full while being devout and religious at the same time.

Religion addresses our deepest longings. It fuels the life deep inside us, that fleeting but precarious life that we are called upon to live and live to the full. Religion should enhance our lives in every way. It should enlarge our lives, not shrink them. It is not possible to have abundant life if one is disconnected from God. God is the source of life. If we remain close to God, we will receive life in abundance. Life is from God, a gift to be lived and enjoyed. To use a gift well is the best way of saying 'thank' to the donor. We are called to live deeply to love the world, but also to look beyond it.

## **Prayers for Priests and for Priestly Vocations**

*Our heavenly Father, I would like to thank you everything you have done for me and thank you for your unwavering support of me as my Shepherd. I thank you for those who act as your instruments of this deep love and commitment. Please to continue to help me to fulfill my duties and my role of shepherding your people in the three Parishes, the people you have placed in my life. May I never run from the glorious responsibility you have called me to. Jesus, I trust in you, please be with me and guide me.*

*I would like to thank you for our faithful priests and bishops in our Archdiocese, whose spiritual fatherhood and example of fidelity, self-sacrifice, and devotion is so vital to the faith of your people. We ask you bless our Bishops and priests and help them to fulfill their work of serving your people in the Archdiocese.*

*I would like to ask you to raise up worthy priests for your Altars and ardent, but gentle servants of the Gospel. Give the Church more priests and keep them faithful in their love and service. May many young men choose to serve you by devoting themselves to the service of your people.*

*I would like to pray for all seminarians of Corpus Christi Seminary and fill the hearts of young men with the spirit of courage and love that they may answer your call to become priests generously. Give parents the grace to encourage vocations in their family by prayer and good example.*

*We ask this, Father, through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.*

***Have a good week to all!***

***Fr. Tao Pham***