

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

April 25, 2021 B

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, though your people walk in the valley of darkness, no evil should they fear, for they follow in faith the call of the Shepherd whom you have sent for their hope and strength. Attune our minds to the sound of his voice and lead our steps in the path he has shown, that we may know the strength of his outstretched arm and enjoy the light of your presence forever. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord. Amen*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: The Gospel presents Jesus as the model Shepherd in his spirit of dedication and willingness to surrender his life for his sheep. The letter of John speaks of the graced outcome of the Shepherd's death: our becoming children of God. This Jesus, moreover, is the only way to the Father, as Peter tells his listeners in Acts. In him alone is salvation, which is now extended to all humanity

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the First Reading, the Psalm, and the Second Reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Acts 4:8-12

Peter responds to the leaders who are disturbed by his healing of the crippled man at the gate of the Temple. He tells the leaders that the crippled man is healed through the power of the risen Christ working through him. Peter proclaims that all salvation comes through Jesus. The image of the rejected cornerstone is a popular proverb. Although it first appears in Psalm 118 in celebration of Israel's triumph in battle, early Christianity adopted it as a metaphor for the Crucifixion. Jesus, rejected by his own people, is revealed as the Savior of the world.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 118

This is a thanksgiving psalm and, in the context of today's liturgy, it is a hymn of thanksgiving for the wonderful gift of salvation gained for us by Christ.

SECOND READING: 1 John 3:1-2

John conveys to his readers the awesome privilege of the children of God. In and through Baptism, we live in God's household. But one of the consequences of this reality is that the world which rejects Jesus will also reject us. John refers to what is called in theology the "already" and the "not yet." Through Baptism, we are "already" children of the light, but our complete transformation in Christ has "not yet" been completed.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

A participant reads the Gospel,

then all pause to reflect.

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: John 10:11-18

Jesus uses the popular and well-loved image of a *shepherd* to describe himself. The chapter follows the healing of the man born blind. Not only do the Pharisees treat the man shamefully, but they also reject Jesus' claim that he is from God. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, defends his authority and rejects that of the Pharisees. Like the *hired hand*, they have no true concern for their people.

There are two qualities that make Jesus a *good* Shepherd. First, he lays down his life for his sheep, and second, he and his sheep know one another. The former quality is the central point of this passage.

Jesus' reference to other sheep and to one flock underscores *universality* and *unity*, which are to characterize this new community of believers. In Jesus' day, the *other sheep* may have referred to the poor, the tax collectors and sinners generally ostracized by society. For the Early Church, the other sheep may have been the Gentiles and others who had yet to hear the Good News. For us, the other sheep might be people of non-Christian religions and non-believers.

Jesus' way of shepherding the flock is not one of domination, but one of care and concern. On the other hand, true sheep are the ones who hear the Shepherd's voice. In a world of a million lies, we sheep find our anchor and truth in Christ and his Word.

FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. Who are some modern examples of "rejected cornerstones"—people whose cause or work is not accepted by the general masses? Have you had a personal experience of being rejected for what you believe or for a cause you feel strongly about?
3. How might the belief that you are an unconditionally loved child of God impact your prayer and the way you relate to Jesus and others?
4. Why is the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd so popular with people? What other image of Jesus do you like?
5. What is the difference between a hireling and a good shepherd when it comes to caring for people? When might we act like a hireling, showing no real concern for those in need of good shepherd care?
6. Name 1 thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed/ act on.

JOURNALING

Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: Dear Jesus, there are so many who are rejected because they do not know their value as a child of God, help me to be your good shepherd to those you send.

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: This week look for ways that you are a hired hand and can transform to a good shepherd.

CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Pray for all who are or feel rejected, all who don't know their value and especially for all who treat others as less than.

CLOSING PRAYER (Together)

For Guidance

Lord, take me where you want me to go;

Let me meet who you want me to meet;

Tell me what you want me to say,

and keep me out of your way.

Father Mychal Judge

From *Treasury of Prayers* by Father Eamon Tobin