

## **FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER – A**

Acts 2:14a, 36-41;  
Psalm 23;  
1 Peter 2: 20b-25;  
John 10:1-10.

**Every year the Church invites us to reflect, during the Easter season on the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. The idea of the Good Shepherd is a word picture rich with feelings of security and the protection and love of a parent and therefore the trust that such security engenders.**

**A young boy, around 4 ½ once illustrated this gospel passage during one of his Sunday school classes. He drew a sheep with flowers in its mouth. When the teacher wondered why, the little boy explained; “the sheep is so happy because Jesus takes him to beautiful places.”**

**This fourth Sunday of Easter we are invited to allow Jesus to take us to beautiful places, places of trust and hope, places of forgiveness and compassion, places where we know we belong.**

**John, the evangelist uses this word picture of the Good Shepherd to help us discover again the person of Jesus, who leads us to life, desirous that we know that life abundantly. Jesus, the Good Shepherd calls us to listen with our hearts that we might know intimate relationship with Him; a relationship characterized by healing and peace.**

**The closeness to Jesus that this all implies is for everyone to experience. Saint Augustine, a man who freely acknowledged his absolute dependence on God, describes this relationship with Jesus in his famous treatise called “Confessions” he says that Jesus is “the One who is more intimate to us than we are to ourselves.”**

**John tells us that Jesus described himself as “the sheep gate.” In the time of Jesus, all of the villager’s sheep would have been corralled together at night in a common sheepfold, surrounded by rocks and briars. The shepherds would take turns guarding the sheep. They would often lie down to rest at the opening of the sheepfold, acting as a gate and risking their own lives to protect the sheep from attackers like thieves or wolves.**

**When Jesus reveals that he is the gate of the sheepfold, he is not just suggesting that he is the unique way into safety or the only way out to pasture. He is saying that he will prevent our destruction by laying down his life. He has indeed come to us that we may have life and have it abundantly. It is the fundamental and profound truth of our faith that Jesus loves us so much that he willingly laid down his life that we might know freedom from sin and death. He is the Good Shepherd who bore our sins on the cross and by his wounds we have been healed. It is for this reason, we are assured, that God’s love is so totally poured out into Christ – and so empowering that his life, even though laid down, is given back again.**

**Christ’s death and resurrection is the full realization of the promise we hear in Psalm 23, today’s responsorial. With this shepherd we shall never want. We will have repose. We will be lead and refreshed and guided along right paths.**

**Permit me to end with a reflection drawing all this together and completing the word picture of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.**

*“If it is true as the Scriptures insist  
That God was proclaimed by the prophets  
To be a kind of shepherd of Israel...”*

*And if it is also true that later on  
Followers of Jesus would remember  
That he too spoke of shepherding  
And never losing one in his care...*

*We know it is true he proclaimed  
He was the Good Shepherd.*

*If all this is true...really honest-to-God true...  
Then does this mean also that we are  
The stinky, smelly, not always so smart sheep?*

*Probably!  
It is good then  
That when the Shepherd looks on us  
He doesn't see smelly and dumb,  
Rich or poor, Good or bad,  
Ugly or fat, or any such stuff.*

*He sees us simply  
As his Beloved  
Whom he loves  
Tenderly, respectfully, and always!*

*He is the human gate  
Lying down to keep us safe  
To keep the wolves and danger out.  
His shepherd's heart of love is enough for us!*

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**[Some of the above thoughts are from a homily on the Fourth Sunday of Easter by John F. Kavanaugh, S. J. as found in The Word Embodied, Orbis Books, 1998, pages 54-56.]**