

# Reflection for the 4th Sunday of Easter, Cycle A

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The readings for this Sunday can be found at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/050320.cfm>

## **1st Reading:** *Acts 2:14a, 36-41*

The selection we have today is the end of Peter's speech at Pentecost. In last week's selection, he proclaimed Jesus risen from the dead and today fills out the Apostolic kerygma by proclaiming him Lord and Messiah. The people's response to Peter's preaching was to become members of the way and receive the Holy Spirit too.

## **2nd Reading:** *1 Peter 2:20b-25*

Today's selection continues from last week to a section where Peter likens Jesus to the suffering servant of Isaiah. You will hear him tell us that Jesus gave us an example to follow in his suffering and reminds us that we are in his sheepfold where our souls will be protected.

## **Gospel:** *John 10:1-10*

**The gatekeeper opens it [the gate] for him, and the sheep hear his voice, as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.** Jn 10:3

I know this Gospel story is given to us during the Easter season, but it reminds me of Christmas. It is the remark that the shepherd [Jesus] calls his sheep by name. It makes me think of Santa Claus calling his reindeer by name... You know, "And he whistled, and shouted, and call'd them by name: 'Now, Dasher! Now, Dancer! Now, Prancer, and Vixen! On, Comet! On, Cupid! On, Donner and Blixen!'" (from *The Night Before Christmas*)

Think about it. Santa loved his reindeer and they loved him. That's the way they show it in every movie. They've developed a relationship over time. And, that's the way shepherds were in the ancient world. Scripture scholars say they had pet names for their sheep and did call those ones by name. The other significant image here is that the shepherd walks ahead of them and they follow him. Again, Scripture scholars say, that's the way they did it in Jesus' time.

For us to have that kind of relationship with the Lord, we have to do our part. We have to learn to hear his voice. We have to learn to trust, and follow him. We have to let him lead us to "verdant pastures" as Psalm 23 says.

Since verdant pastures seems to be the goal, let's think about that for a second. My vision is a grassy meadow where sheep graze, eating the grass. Some are lying down relaxing. The lambs are feeding or playing with each other. Everything is peaceful and calm and wonderful.

But that's not my life! And, I am a follower of the Lord. But I don't follow him all the way yet. I don't quite have the courage for that, and I allow myself, at times, to follow the voices of the false shepherds who climb over the wall rather than enter through the gate. Consequently, I experience anxiety and frustration and anger and a whole host of other things that get in the way of right relationship. I don't know how many years I have left in me, but, before I go, I want to experience that kind of peace that is in the image of verdant pastures, here, in this world.

Sometimes I think that I will be able to accomplish that type of lifestyle when I retire. The more mature part of me knows, though, that if I can't achieve it now, I won't be able to achieve it in retirement either. The false shepherd voices that I listen to now might be gone then, but they will be replaced by other false shepherd voices if I have not learned to turn a deaf ear to them.

The only solution, I guess, is to put the work in now. Learn to identify and ignore the false shepherd voices. It can't be that hard. They don't sound like what I know the Lord's voice to be. The problem is, though, I've gotten so comfortable living with them, that I have a hard time turning them off. We have to learn to identify them and turn them off; they are the ones that cause right relationship problems (right relationship with God, right relationship with others, and right relationship with ourselves).

At the same time, we need to consciously work on allowing the Lord to guide us in every circumstance, during every hour of every day of our lives. The more we do this, the more we come to know him, the more we come to recognize, and trust, his voice and the more we rest in those verdant pastures.

### **Reflection Questions:**

"But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice, as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice." Jn 10:2-4

#### **Question:**

What words or phrases jumped out at you during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? (Why do you think they jumped out at you?) What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

#### **Alternative:**

Reflect upon/Share about who, or what, you allow to guide your life; your social group, a political party, a particular religious figure, a socio-political movement, a particular media personality, etc.? How does that guidance compare to the voice of the Lord you hear in the Gospels? What can you do to make sure you do not recognize voices contrary to the Lord's?

## Verse by Verse

Jn 10:1 “Amen, amen, I say to you...” | This is a continuation of the Man Born Blind story and Jesus has just told the Pharisees that their sin remains because they say they can see. He is still speaking to them and saying ‘Listen well...’ They are the ones he is saying are thieves and robbers. This is the judgement to which Jn 9:39 refers.

Jn 10:3 “...he calls his own sheep by name...” | This describes a close connection between the shepherd and his sheep. It points to the intimate relationship Jesus has with his followers. Palestinian shepherds, even today evidently, have pet names for their sheep.

Jn 10:4 “...he walks ahead of them and the sheep follow him...” | This is still done, in Palestine, today. In the west shepherds guide their sheep from the side by pushing them in the direction they want. The imagery of following him is discipleship imagery.

Jn 10:4 “When he has driven out all his own...” | This identifies that it was a common sheepfold commonly used in ancient Palestine. Sheep from several flocks were penned together through the night.

Jn 10:7 “...I am the gate for the sheep.” | There are mixed images in this story. On the one hand, the gate keeps out the illegitimate shepherds, the Pharisees. On the other hand, those who come in and go out through him go out to salvation. This seems to me to be the same as Jn 14:6 where Jesus, talking about his upcoming ascension, is telling Thomas, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life...”.

In Jn 10:11, which follows our selection of today, Jesus will say “I am the good shepherd...”. He is the shepherd who leads his sheep to salvation. Some Scripture scholars point out that shepherds might spend the night sleeping across the opening to the sheepfold, in effect being the gate. In this way he could be the gate and the shepherd.

Jn 10:10 “...slaughter...” | The Anchor Yale Bible Commentary tells us that the Greek word used here is not normally used to mean simply killing, but to mean sacrifice. They suggest that it might be a veiled reference to the Jewish priestly authorities.