

Reflection for the 4th Sunday of Easter

This Sunday is the 4th Sunday of the Easter Season and the common name for this Sunday is Good Shepherd Sunday. This name is derived from the message of the Gospel readings for this Sunday which is taken from the 10th chapter of the Gospel of John. In the cycle for the Sunday readings A, B and C all have a different Gospel reading for the 4th Sunday of Easter but all three cycles take the reading from the Gospel of John Chapter 10.

Chapter 10 in the Gospel of John is 42 verses long and 30 of these verses focus on the message of Jesus the Good Shepherd. The Gospel reading that we have this Sunday, in cycle A speaks of Jesus as the gatekeeper or the gate that only lets in the worthy shepherds into the fold. The message is that the true and good shepherd is Jesus the gatekeeper, but he calls others to help him lead his followers in this world, helping them journey to the new world, the heavenly kingdom. In cycle B the reading from the Gospel of John has Jesus stating in the first verse of the reading that He is the *Good Shepherd*, and He lays down His life for His sheep. The final cycle, year C for Good Shepherd Sunday is just four verses long, verses 27 thru 30 in chapter 10 of the Gospel of John. In this reading the message is that the Good Shepherd leads His sheep to eternal life.

As we look at each one of the Gospel readings for years A, B, and C of the three-year cycle of Sunday reading for Good Shepherd Sunday, each one of the readings has a unique message. But at the same time all the Gospel Readings of the three-year cycle have the same basic message for Good Shepherd Sunday. Whether we see Jesus as the Good Shepherd or as the gatekeeper He is concerned about His followers and will always lead them in their journey in this world and to eternal life.

It is interesting to think of the fact that the Sunday after Easter we had the Gospel Reading of *Doubting Thomas*, found in the Gospel of John 20:19-31 and last Sunday in cycle A we have the Gospel Reading taken for the Gospel of Luke 24:13-35, this reading is often referred to as the *Road to Emmaus*. In both these readings we encounter the risen Lord the Good Shepherd leading and helping His followers, His sheep. In the Easter Season we embrace the joy of the resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ. But we also have readings that remind us that Jesus after His resurrection from the dead did not forsake His followers. Jesus has and will continue to reach out to His followers helping us follow Him in this world and to eternal life.

Good Shepherd Sunday, with its Gospel Reading taken from chapter 10 of the Gospel of John reminds us that Jesus is with us in all moments of our lives. He was there for the early Church after His resurrection and He is here for you and I, as we deal with the Covid-19 Crisis. Just as Jesus was there for Thomas, Cleopas and companion so He is here for us. Just as a shepherd looks out for his sheep 24 hours a day, seven days a week, so Jesus our Good Shepherd is looking out for us.

The message that we take away from this 4th Sunday of Easter is truly a heart-warming one. It is a message that reminds us that Jesus will never leave us, He will never abandon us, He is here to guide us and help us in every moment of our lives. In our Gospel Readings for the 2nd and 3rd Sundays of Easter we hear of Thomas, Cleopas and companion all feeling that Jesus had abandoned them. They felt they were left along to work things out and determine a course for their lives. In both cases we hear how Jesus, the Risen Lord, reached out to them in their time of need and helped them find their way.

May we take comfort in the fact that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, was there for Thomas, Cleopas, and members of the early Church. We can look through the centuries and see that Jesus has been there for every generation and all peoples. Our Good Shepherd is here for us today and will be here for us tomorrow. May we trust in our loving Lord and follow Him in this world and journey with Him to eternal Life.