

# Sunday, May 3, 2020

## Fourth Sunday of Easter

### Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

#### Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Acts 2:14, 36-41

2nd Reading: 1 Peter 2:20-25

Responsorial: Psalm 23:1-6

Gospel: John 10:1-10

### Following Jesus' Example by Being A Shepherd for God's People

*The shepherd calls his own sheep by name. (John 10:3)*

Good Shepherd Sunday often brings bucolic scenes to mind. Picture a well-groomed shepherd, crook in hand, seated peacefully in lush, green pastures, surrounded by docile sheep. It's beautiful, isn't it?

But such an image falls short on two counts. First, shepherd and flock are often dirty and decidedly *not* peaceful. Second, Jesus called himself a "shepherd" as a rebuke to the Jewish leaders who had just rejected him and cast out a man he had cured of blindness. A true shepherd, Jesus told them, knows his sheep well and leads them with care. And Jesus, the *good* shepherd, goes so far that he "lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

We can read Jesus' words here as a course correction for his opponents, but we can learn something for ourselves as well. For we are all shepherds for God's people in one way or another. We are all called to care for his people by following in Jesus' footsteps. Our "flock" may include our children, our parents, or our catechism class. We may be quiet shepherds welcoming a new family at church or mentoring a coworker. But no matter who is in our flock, we need to remember that the sheep belong to Jesus and not to us. He treasures each one of them and wants us to reflect his own love and self-sacrifice.

So ask yourself, "How well do I know my sheep? Do I know the names of my coworkers or fellow parishioners? Do I know the challenges my loved ones are facing?" Sometimes we are so busy with our own affairs that we overlook the hurt, weariness, or fear in someone right next to us. But following Jesus' example, we can set aside our concerns, "call them by name," and listen to their needs. Perhaps we can even lead them to a place of peace. That's one small way to be a shepherd for God's sheep.

*"Jesus, help me to lay down my life for your sheep today."*

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* ([www.wau.org](http://www.wau.org)) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

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**Questions for Reflection or Discussion:**

1. The first reading begins with these words: *Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed: "Let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."* He then encourages the people to *Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is made to you and to your children and to all those far off, whomever the Lord our God will call.*
  - Why do you think Peter stressed to the people the need to recognize Jesus as *both Lord and Christ* (Messiah)?
  - We, as baptized Christian, have also received *the gift of the Holy Spirit*. How would you describe what it means to receive this gift? In what way has this gift made a difference in the way you live out your life each day?
  - What steps can you take to allow the Holy Spirit to take an even more active role in guiding and leading you?
2. The responsorial psalm is the very familiar 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. In it, the psalmist encourages us with these words: *"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. ... He guides me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side. With your rod and your staff that give me courage. You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come."*
  - In what ways are these words an expansion of the words spoken by St. John Paul II: "Do not be afraid"?
  - Even though we know that the *Lord is my Shepherd*, what are the fears that can keep you from being the Catholic Christian you are called to be?
  - How can you use the words from Psalm 23 to help you to overcome these fears?
3. The second reading opens with these words: *Beloved: If you are patient when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps.* It continues with these words: *When he was insulted, he returned no insult; when he suffered, he did not threaten; instead, he handed himself over to the one who judges justly.*
  - What do you think St. Peter meant when he said, *If you are patient when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God?*
  - How does St. Peter's description of Jesus' response to insults/suffering compare to how you respond to them?
  - Do you think it is possible to respond in the way Jesus did? Why or why not?
4. In the Gospel reading, Jesus reminds his listeners (and us) that he is the good shepherd who *calls his own sheep by name and leads them out and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice.* The Gospel goes on to say that *Although Jesus used this figure of speech, the Pharisees did not realize what he was trying to tell them.* Also, in the Gospel reading, Satan is described as a thief who *comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy*, whereas Jesus *came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.*
  - What do you think Jesus meant when he said his *sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice?*
  - Why do you think the Pharisees did not understand Jesus' message?
  - In what ways do you "recognize" Jesus' voice in prayer, the Sacraments, and through the Scriptures?
  - How does Satan use his role to *slaughter and destroy?* How might you counter his lies and accusations?
5. The meditation is a reflection on the Gospel reading and includes with these words: "We are all shepherds for God's people in one way or another. We are all called to care for his people by following in Jesus' footsteps ... So ask yourself, 'How well do I know my sheep? Do I know the names of my coworkers or fellow parishioners? Do I know the challenges my loved ones are facing?' Sometimes we are so busy with our own affairs that we overlook the hurt, weariness, or fear in someone right next to us. But following Jesus' example, we can set aside our concerns, 'call them by name,' and listen to their needs. Perhaps we can even lead them to a place of peace."
  - Do you believe that "We are all shepherds for God's people in one way or another" and that "We are all called to care for his people by following in Jesus' footsteps."?
  - How would you answer the questions posed by the ending words of the meditation: "How well do I know my sheep? Do I know the names of my coworkers or fellow parishioners? Do I know the challenges my loved ones are facing?"

**Take some time now and pray ask the Lord to give you a heart like his heart, so that you would have a shepherd's heart for others. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.**

***"Jesus, help me to lay down my life for your sheep today."***

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is currently a member of the board of directors of the ChristLife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization ([www.christlife.org](http://www.christlife.org)), a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal ([www.nsc-chariscenter.org](http://www.nsc-chariscenter.org)), and a board member of The Love of Christ Foundation. Prior to this, Maurice was the founding executive director of the National fellowship of Catholic Men, a chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* ([www.wau.org](http://www.wau.org)), and a director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry. He can be contacted at [mblumberg@wau.org](mailto:mblumberg@wau.org) or [mblumberg@aol.com](mailto:mblumberg@aol.com).]