



WEEKLY GOSPEL REFLECTION



FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, CYCLE A

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I am the good shepherd, says the Lord; I know my sheep, and mine know me." John 10:14

This Fourth Sunday of Easter we call "Good Shepherd Sunday." There is no story sweeter in the Four Gospels than this. How proper that it is proclaimed every year in the springtime, as people shed their heavy winter-wear and the womenfolk dress in Easter pastels. The children are restless with the promise of being unfettered after a long winter. I remember the joy in my son's eyes as we visited the sheep and newborn lambs, just down the road at the farmers market. My dad always said that a child's security is a God-given birthright. I was given the mantle of the "Security Officer in Chief" during those childhood-into-teen years for my son. My parish community was the source of his now lifelong friendships that endure with a peace promised by the Risen Christ – "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. ... I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*" John 14:27 As was the God-given gift of his birthright, my son now naturally enters through the narrow mystical gate, and his family follows... "*I am the gate. Whoever enters through me... will come in and go out and find pasture.*"

But not all are given this birthright of the abiding secure life of a sheepfold. We see now in greater numbers children that live a very insecure existence. It seems that the forces of the Evil One have taken on the disturbing role as the "*thief [that] comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy.*" John 10:9 The role of the Christian disciple has never been more explicitly and clearly defined. We are the ever-bright City on a Hill, drawing water from the Fountain of Life and pouring it out to foster a new spiritual springtime for our country and world. We are the mystical Body of Christ, incarnate mercy, love, and a mystical peace that is other-worldly. As such, it is for us to pray for the welfare of our extended communities; as prophets to proclaim the joy of the Good Shepherd Gospel; and as humble servants to sow our time, talent and treasure that really isn't ours to keep, but a gift to be given to those most in need of His mercy. "*I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.*" John 10:10

In reflection this week, consider the two images present in this Gospel, "The Lord is my Shepherd," and Jesus (and His Church) as the gate by which the sheep enter. Reflecting on these helpful images and parallels, one central point should be stressed: The sheep follow him because they recognize his voice. This is literally true: Sheep only follow their own shepherd's voice. It is true from the point of view of faith as well: When we know the true shepherd's voice through faith, we will not follow false shepherds or mistake the allure of the world's empty promises for the voice of the true Messiah. Jesus is the model for all who are called to leadership; he is the gate by which we enter the fold of the faithful.

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Matthew 19:14

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to John

Jesus said:

*"Amen, amen, I say to you,
whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate
but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber.
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 the shepherd 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.
But they will not follow a stranger;
they will run away from him,
because they do not recognize the voice of strangers."*

Although Jesus used this figure of speech,
the Pharisees did not realize what he was trying to tell them.

So Jesus said again,

*"Amen, amen, I say to you,
I am the gate for the sheep.
All who came before me are thieves and robbers,
but the sheep did not listen to them.
I am the gate.
Whoever enters through me will be saved,
and will come in and go out and find pasture.
A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy;
I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly."*

The Gospel of the Lord

