

## Lectio Divina

### Fourth Sunday of Easter – Year A

#### Good Shepherd Sunday

**Readings: Acts 2:14a, 36-41 (First Reading), Psalm 23 (Responsorial Psalm), 1 Peter 2:20b-25 (Second Reading), and John 10:1-10 (Gospel)**

#### Lectio

In this gospel reading, Jesus presents himself as both The Gate and The Good Shepherd.

The reading is situated in the Gospel of John directly following an episode where, after Jesus healed the blind man, the pharisees seek to undermine his authority, saying Jesus is not from God and questioning how a 'sinner' can perform miracle healings. The text of that passage tells us that on hearing all this, the people were 'divided'.

In today's reading, Jesus urges his followers not to listen to the voices of thieves and brigands (the pharisees) but to listen only to His voice, the voice of the Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for us and rising, brings us to eternal life with Him.

#### Meditatio

- ***"The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep."*** The parable begins by asserting the authority of the shepherd and the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep.
- ***"... and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."*** Now we are being drawn deeper into this relationship - the sheep hear his voice and recognise its loving authority. From among all the sheep in the sheepfold, the shepherd calls "his own sheep by name". Here we pick up the echo of Isaiah's description of God's personal relationship with the people of Israel: "I have called you by your name, you are mine" (Isaiah 43:1), and Ezekiel's description of God as shepherd (Ezekiel 34).
- ***"When he has brought out all of his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice."*** The shepherd doesn't leave his sheep to find their own way over rocky ground and among many paths, some of which could end in danger. He goes ahead of them, leading the way, ensuring their safety and their progress along the right path. And the sheep follow Him because they KNOW His voice. To know and be known is one of our deepest human needs. To know God and be known by Him gives us a deep, internal sense of security which cannot be shaken or stolen.
- ***"Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep."*** Now we move from parable to explanation. Jesus tells us explicitly that He is the Gate. He himself is the entry point, the way by which we enter into relationship. And there is freedom to be found in entering the Gate that is Jesus Himself. If we come and go by the Gate that is Jesus we, the sheep, find pasture, with all of its connotations of abundant, life-sustaining goodness and nourishment. Our beautiful Psalm today expands on this vision of abundance, safety and fullness of life (Psalm 23).
- ***"I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full."*** This is a promise both for the here and now, and also into eternity. And, as St Benedict asks in the Prologue to his Rule, "Who is there with a love of true life and a longing for days of real fulfilment?" In other words, who among us is not seeking life to the full? All we have to do is listen for the voice of the Good Shepherd and follow Him.

## **Oratio/Evangelisatio**

My response is that yes, I do seek life to the full, with all my heart!

But in a world that is so noisy, with so many voices all clamouring for my attention, how can I attune my ear and my heart to listen for the voice of The Good Shepherd?

St Benedict gives us a framework in his Rule of how to tune into the voice of Jesus, starting with the Prologue in which he says we must not only listen, and incline the ear of the heart towards the Lord's voice, but also attend to what we hear, and let it pierce our heart. We are to start with prayer and let the Gospel be our guide, as we undertake this journey together, towards fullness of life.

*Lord Jesus, Good Shepherd,*

*I desire with all my heart to have the fullness of life in you.*

*Help me to cut through the noise of our world, and my internal noise of anxieties, worries and preoccupations, to listen for your voice.*

*Open my heart to hear your voice in scripture, in sacrament, and in prayer, so that in turn, I can also recognise and honour you in those around me.*

*Let me, through living in you, be a gate for others to enter and know you.*

*Lead me, Good Shepherd, along the paths of life, secure in knowing you and being known and called by name.*

*Amen.*

On this Good Shepherd Sunday, we also pray with thanksgiving for Pope Leo XIV, our bishops and priests, abbots and abbesses and all who lead their flocks after the heart of Jesus. We pray for continued vocations to the priesthood, so that having heard the Good Shepherd call their name, the priests of tomorrow will listen to that voice and respond with fidelity and generosity. Amen.

Oblate Debra (Benedicta) Vermeer