



FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Year B

Acts 4:8-12

Psalm 118:1, 8-9, 21-23, 26, 28, 29

1 John 3:1-2

John 10:11-18

Gathering

(An unlit candle, a large crucifix and some spring flowers are set on a table covered with a festive cloth.)

We reflect this week on the image of Jesus as shepherd. He gives his life that we might live. Last week, we encountered Jesus' bodily manifestation to Thomas and reflected on how, as the body of Christ today, we are meant to be living proof of his presence in the world today. How did you put your body on the line this past week as a witness to Christ?

Prayer

(The candle is lit. The leader invites members to quiet attention to Christ's presence with them. A selection of instrumental music is played. When the music is complete, the community pauses for a brief time, after which the prayer continues as follows.)

Leader: God our Father,
by the promise you made
in the life, death and resurrection of Christ your Son,

you bring together in your Spirit, from all nations,
a people to be your own.
Keep the Church faithful to its mission:
may it be a leaven in the world
renewing us in Christ,
and transforming us into your family
In the name of Jesus our Lord.

All: Amen.

Liturgy of the Hours, Ordinary Time
Weeks 1-17, Appendix III, Opening Prayer

HEARING THE LORD'S GOSPEL

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites members to name a word or phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.)

When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed. The leader then poses these questions: “What draws you to this gospel?” “Where do you resist this gospel?” The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After about a minute, the leader invites members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After additional time for silent reflection, the leader invites members to re-arrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing. The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)

Reflection

This week we celebrate, Good Shepherd Sunday. While meditating on the gospel reading I was reminded of a small monument I saw a while back. It depicted five soldiers on a battlefield; two crouching low, aiming their weapons in different directions; two laying on the ground, badly wounded, showing evidence of emergency treatment; the fifth, a medical corpsman, lurches forward so as to throw himself flat on the ground between the other four. It wasn't obvious, at first glance, but on closer inspection, I noticed the grenade on the ground, where the corpsman would land. He does not flee like a hired hand. The corpsman's mission is to save lives at any cost, including his/her own life.

We also, who share Christ's name, share in a similar mission; the mission to save and protect lives; we are called to heal, to mend, to counsel, to uplift and console, to carry the lost and the wounded back home; we are called to be good shepherds. This is our mission because it is, the Good Shepherd's own mission. Recall Jesus' words to Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these? ... Feed my lambs... Tend my sheep... Feed my sheep." Herein lays our mission, entrusted to Peter and to the whole church.

Through the ages there are many people who have laid down their lives for a fellow human, physically or metaphorically, in big ways and small. But there is one who models this generosity for us above all. Though he is divine, Jesus humbles himself for all our sakes, not only for those of "this fold," but all.

In laying down his life for us, he covers evil, he covers our sins. There is but "one name under heaven...by which we are to be saved," Jesus, the Good Shepherd. United with him as he was with his Father, we may find the courage to give ourselves for the sake of others.

Questions For Reflection And Conversation

- ◆ When has the extraordinary generosity of another been a saving presence in your life?
- ◆ Who are the wounded and the lost you are called to tend?
- ◆ In what ways do you hear Christ's voice leading you these days?
- ◆ How do you share in caring for the Lord's sheep?

HEARING THE GOSPEL'S LORD

(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The leader then poses these questions: "What do you hear Christ saying to us in hearing and sharing his word?" "What do you want to hold on to for yourself from this session?" "How are you/we being called to live in response to God's word?" After a pause, the leader invites the community to conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)

Response In Action Suggestions

- ◆ Set aside twenty minutes some day this week for reflection and prayer. Acknowledge before God those from whom you are alienated, those you may even regard as enemies. Pray for God's mercy and forgiveness for yourself and for them.
- ◆ Explore the opportunity to volunteer at a local hospital. In the Hartford area, go to www.stfranciscare.org. On the home page, click on Become a Volunteer for more information.
- ◆ Become a youth mentor. Contact Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America (www.bbbsfl.org) to connect with the effort in your area.

Prayer

(After a brief pause, the gospel of the week is re-proclaimed by a member of the community. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: "What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?" "What do you say to him in response?" The community pauses for a full five, perhaps even seven, minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental may be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two or a brief thought that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. When this sharing is complete, the prayer concludes as follows.)

All: God our Father,
 we give you thanks for Jesus, the Good Shepherd,
 he who laid down his life for his sheep.
 Give us the grace to embrace the sacrifices asked
 of us to heal the wounded, rescue the lost and love those
 whom others have forgotten.

 We ask this in his name, Jesus, our Lord,
 who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
 one God, forever and ever.

Amen.

(Members join in singing, "Psalm 23: The Lord is My Shepherd." The song may be found on the Internet. When the song is complete, members exchange a sign of peace.)