

The fourth Sunday of Easter is called Good Shepherd Sunday, and the Gospel passages for all the liturgical cycles are taken from the tenth chapter of St. John's Gospel. Jesus presents himself in this chapter as the Good Shepherd. The most consoling thing he says in today's Gospel is that he calls his own, that is us, and he calls us personally. He knows each of us personally, and he loves us with a personal love. He is not simply a leader of the masses who is interested in the response of the group. He is personally interested in each one of us. He is watching us and gazing at us with love.

This love calls for a response. Jesus himself describes the response of those who belong to him: "the sheep hear his voice..." Jesus is aware that there are many competing voices calling for our allegiance. There are others who will be pretending to bring us to green pastures but in reality are thieves who want only to get what we have, or worse, get us for their own selfish purposes. These are thieves. They are not after the welfare of those whom they seduce and to whom they promise gifts or happiness. They are only after their own interests. The Lord says, "the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy."

In contrast, Jesus assures us at the conclusion of today's Gospel, "I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full." Jesus is really the solution to all the world's great problems: poverty, war, pollution, discrimination, and so on. Violence, economic exploitation, sexual discrimination, racial hate are the thieves and the brigands who are trying to mislead the human flock and make it stray away from its legitimate Good Shepherd. Yet, it is only by following our Good Shepherd that we will be safe and find the pasture we need. As humans we are hungry for food, freedom, justice, love, peace, truth and understanding. Only Christ can satisfy those seven hungers. If we resolutely choose to follow him—both in our private lives and in our public lives—we will be able to sing with the Psalmist in our responsorial psalm, which is Psalm 23:

"The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.
Fresh and green are the pastures where he gives me repose.
Near restful waters he leads me, to revive my drooping spirit.
He guides me along the right path; he is true to his name.
Surely goodness and kindness shall follow me all the days of my life.
In the Lord's own house shall I dwell for ever and ever."