

Read

Acts 13:14, 43-52

Psalm 100:1-2, 3, 5

Revelation 7:9, 14b-17

John 10:27-30

LIVING THE WORD

Fourth Sunday of Easter

May 8, 2022



REFLECTION

A local farmer went out of town one weekend and asked my friend Lenny to care for his flock of sheep. On Saturday morning, Lenny pulled on his boots and gloves and set out for the hillside where the sheep lay. He wanted the flock to move closer to the barn to make mealtime easier. "Hey sheep, sheep, sheep!" Lenny beckoned in the most commanding voice he could muster. No response. Lenny tried again: "Come on, sheep, sheep, sheep!" The animals did not budge.

After a few frustrating minutes, Lenny changed his plan and lugged the food out to the sheep. He realized what seasoned farmers, and Jesus Christ, know in their bones: sheep are loyal to their shepherd. They know his or her voice—and this is the voice they will follow, no matter how hard a visitor tries.

Today's short, powerful Gospel presents the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, who through his death and resurrection gifts eternal life to his sheep. "No one can take them out of my hand," Jesus says with confidence and comfort (John 10:28). How blessed we are to be part of his flock.

QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ Do you ever hear Jesus' voice?
- ❖ Like loyal sheep, how can you follow Jesus' call more closely this week?



ACTION

Images of Jesus as the Good Shepherd and his people like the sheep become so much more real when we can interact with the actual animals being referenced. Consider spending the day at a local farm, if you live close enough to one. (Even if they don't have sheep, this is still a good experience.) Talk with a farmer about their relationship to the animals. Pet the animals (if the farmer allows it), and say a prayer of gratitude for their example of loyalty.



Why do you follow Jesus?
Post a few reasons on your social media pages this week and invite others to do the same.



May 8, 2022

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

LECTIONARY #51C

Acts 13:14, 43-52

Psalm 100:1-2, 3, 5

Revelation 7:9, 14b-17

John 10:27-30

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

A shepherd is someone who cares for a flock. He protects the sheep, helps them to find safe food and water, and he protects them from the dangers of wandering and predators. A flock is entirely dependent on its shepherd, and it survives because of the shepherd's care. Jesus is our shepherd because he cares for us, protects us, and he guides us. We are his sheep who need his protection from the dangers that exist in the fallen world. Each of us must decide to follow our shepherd. Each of us can use our free will to follow Jesus and to obey the Good Shepherd. The faithful comprise the flock of the Lord.

Q FOCUS: *Jesus is the Good Shepherd.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

Liturgically speaking, the Church is just about half-way through the Easter season. Easter is a long season, and we are meant to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord with great joy. After this week, we still have the Fifth and Sixth Sundays of Easter, and the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord, which is usually celebrated on the Seventh Sunday of Easter (but not in every diocese; some may celebrate it on the Thursday between the Sixth and Seventh Sundays of Easter). Since Easter is calculated by a lunar rendering, Ascension and Pentecost are calculated from the Easter date. Traditionally, before people had access to calendars, the dates of these feasts were

announced on Epiphany. It is fascinating and wonderful to consider the two thousand years of tradition we join as we celebrate the liturgical year.

Church Teaching Connection

The Church uses many different images to describe her relationship with Jesus, as well as her relationship with the faithful. The Second Vatican Council's document *Lumen gentium* (also referred to in English as the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church), describes some of these different relationships. The Church is called a sacrament of the Lord, through which we enter into relationship with God. The Church is the flock of Christ, the temple of the Lord, and the bride of Christ. We hear that the Church is the body, and Christ is the head. In all of these images, we see Christ as the foundation for our lives as faithful disciples who gather together as the body of Christ (see *Lumen gentium*, 1, 6, and 7).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

John 10:27-30

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

Jesus said: "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is

greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

Today's Gospel reading is very short. Despite its brevity, the words speak volumes to us and to our Catholic faith. In this reading we learn about who we are, and who Jesus is. We come to deeper understanding of the role Jesus has in our lives, from the time he walked the earth to the present time, when we encounter him in prayer, in the Eucharist, and in the ministry that is done in his name.

► What is a shepherd?

A shepherd is a protector of sheep. Domesticated sheep are creatures that do not live independently of humans. They are dependent on human caregivers for food, clean water, protection, and general safety. Sheep are easy prey for predators, so shepherds stand at the ready to protect their charges. Shepherds put themselves in the path of danger in order to protect their sheep from harm. Shepherds do this because of who they are; like a teacher teaches, and a mother mothers, this is what shepherds do.

► What does it mean that Jesus is our shepherd? What does this mean about who we are?

It means that we are the sheep. We are the ones who face danger, and we are the ones who need protection. It is we who are dependent on our shepherd for all that is good, healthy, and necessary. The dangers we face without our shepherd are many. Without our shepherd we would fall victim to predators, and we

would have more fear of that which could harm us. Without our shepherd we would be more likely to wander away and become lost. Without our shepherd we would not have safety or the things we require in order to thrive.

► What are the dangers we face? What are things that are likely to cause us to become lost and wander away from Christ?

We differ from sheep in that we have a consciousness they lack, and we have free will that we must use to follow our shepherd. Sheep are trained to trust and follow their shepherd. We humans must engage our free will to actively give our assent to be shepherded. Jesus is our shepherd regardless of our own thoughts on the matter, but we are called to cooperate with him. The question is whether or not we will trust him as shepherd, and live in his guidance.

► How do we say yes to God, and allow ourselves to be the sheep of Jesus' flock?

Sometimes we hear about people who believe that we say one big yes to God in a particular prayer, and that one action will earn us a place in heaven. What such a theology lacks is the recognition that saying yes to Jesus is something we do every single day, not just on one occasion. Sometimes our yes needs to be every hour, or every minute. Essentially, we are called to orient our entire lives toward the yes we give to God. Our yes encompasses all aspects of our lives—our spiritual lives, social lives, school lives, our studies, and our relationships. All aspects of our lives are meant to be under the care of our good shepherd, Jesus.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 180.

A shepherd selflessly cares for his flock, and Jesus is our shepherd.

We are called to cooperate with our shepherd.

Free will is a gift from God, and we engage our free will to obey God.

Act on the Word

Allowing Jesus to Be our Good Shepherd

For this activity, you will need to prepare several scenarios in which a teen might face the choice of following Jesus or rejecting him. Have several of these scenarios written down so you can distribute them to the small groups. See the activity below for examples.

Many of the teens might remember making crafts when they were children that showed Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Some may have colored pictures, others may have glued cotton balls on paper plates and added four legs and a fluffy lamb face. Briefly talk with the young people about how, as children, it is easy to understand the concept of the faithful being like sheep and the Lord being our loving shepherd. However, as children grow toward adulthood, they have a natural reflex to question authority and they develop a need to understand the “why” of needing a shepherd. Today’s activity will help the teens examine what it means to follow Jesus at this point in their lives. (Note: Some young people may not have considered this aspect of their faith, while others may be making a keen effort to follow Jesus. Still others may be actively rejecting anything that appears to be an authority. Be aware of these different states and be sensitive to where the teens are in their faith journey.)

Divide the teens into groups and give them scenarios in which a person could choose to follow Jesus, or not follow Jesus. Ask them to analyze the fruits of the actions chosen. For example, a scenario could be a school situation in which a person can choose honesty or dishonesty on a test. Another scenario could

be how a group of students choose to treat someone who is poor, disabled, unpopular, or simply different than classmates in some way. Use the following questions to guide the discussions. When groups have finished discussing things, have them share their reflections with the larger group.

- * What are the fruits of following Jesus in such situations?
- * What does it look like to reject Jesus in these situations, and what fruits does rejection bear?
- * How do we represent the faith at home, at school, and in our communities?

Closing Prayer

*Christ, our Good Shepherd,
we are the sheep of your flock,
and through us, your shepherd all creation.*

*Be near us this day
to recognize your voice and live
our lives belonging to you
and the One who sent you as a light to
the world.*

*You live and reign with God the Father in
the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.*

Amen.

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday’s Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.