

Fourth Sunday of Easter – April 25, 2021 – Our Lady of Perpetual Help

Scripture Reading: Acts 4:8-12

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said: "Leaders of the people and elders: If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a cripple, namely, by what means he was saved, then all of you and all the people of Israel should know that it was in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead; in his name this man stands before you healed. He is the stone rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved."

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

R. (22) The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone.

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his mercy endures forever.

It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to trust in man.

It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to trust in princes.

R. The stone rejected by the builders has become
the cornerstone.

I will give thanks to you, for you have answered
me and have been my savior.

The stone which the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.

By the LORD has this been done;
it is wonderful in our eyes.

R. The stone rejected by the builders has become
the cornerstone.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the
LORD; we bless you from the house of the
LORD.

I will give thanks to you, for you have answered
me and have been my savior.

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his kindness endures forever.

R. The stone rejected by the builders has become
the cornerstone.

Scripture Reading: 1 John 3:1-2

Beloved: See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Gospel: John 10:11-18

Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them. This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd. This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again. This command I have received from my Father."



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

In Sunday's Gospel, Jesus makes a wonderful comparison of the good shepherd to the mere hired hand. The good shepherd cares about the sheep. The hired one is mainly interested in getting paid. When wolves come, he simply runs away. To discern the difference, take a poetic example.* First, imagine that there are "handles" on what you possess. Everything—honors, assets, etc.—everything has a "handle" that someone could grab in order to take it away from you. Looks, home, car, reputation, career, money saved up for the children's education, respect from others, pleasure, youth, you name it. What do you own that you could not lose? You grab your own handles and hold on tight. But an ominous power comes into play at this point. The forces of greed tell our hearts that everything in the whole world is there just to be grabbed for oneself and kept. "Greed is a virtue," these forces say, in fact it is the only virtue. The mess of the world situation in this second decade of the 21st century does seem to prove that. It is the hired hand's way of life. But there is an alternate way. It has to do with love, the kind of love that the good shepherd shows us. Its motto is this: The real value in life is to receive and give, not to grab and possess.

All that you have and all that you are is a gift from the good God. If you open your hands, so to speak, you will let God pour into them whatever you really need! And keeping them open lets you easily release your gifts and pass them on to others in need. Two ways of life: "Grab and Keep" on one side. "Receive and Let Go" on the other. Hired Hand versus Good Shepherd. There comes an epic battle between these two ways of life. It is waged on the cross. Evil seizes and tears away from Jesus everything with "handles" on it—friends, followers, career, respect, relation to God, comfort, slaking of thirst, breath, life itself. Evil wins. It takes everything. Yet there is a fatal flaw in the grab-and-keep philosophy. It thinks that nothing at all exists without a handle on it. So we ask, what about love? Love lets go, receives humbly, gives humbly. There is nothing to grab about real love, nothing by way of a handle. Since the devil only sees grabbing and selfishness, to him love must be just another form of self-interest!

So he burrows down to the innermost sanctum of Jesus' soul on the cross, greedy to seize the ultimate prize itself, the power of God. Ravenous for it, salivating, unable to hold back, he throws open the tabernacle doors of Jesus' soul! And he finds that the sacred space is empty, completely empty. Oh, something is present there, but it has no handles. The quiet stillness—receiving gratefully and lightly letting go—these are surely there, but the devil cannot see them. So he goes on his way, confident that everything is now his. But it isn't. Love wins because it has already given everything away. This is why the Good Shepherd can lay down his life for the sheep. This is why the Father loves him and us if we follow.

John Foley, SJ

*I learned the simple poetic explanation of this reflection from Rosemary Haughton's book, The Passionate God (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), especially pp. 112 ff. This is one of my favorite insights so I have tried to boil it down and present it to you here. No promises, though.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. In this reading Peter responds to attempts by the "leaders of the people and elders" to discredit Jesus' message. Do you see efforts to discredit Jesus' message in the world today? Name some. How can you help bring God's saving grace to a world/neighborhood in desperate need of healing?
2. God is always present, hovering over us like a mother hen. Why does God not just jump right in and save us from all the messes we get into?
3. Jesus said, "I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep." Jesus is applying the love between himself and his Father to the relation between himself and his own. What does this tell you about how well you are known and how much you are loved? For whom would you lay down your life?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Almighty ever-living God, lead us to a share in the joys of heaven, so that the humble flock may reach where the brave Shepherd has gone before. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

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