

4th Sunday of Easter, Year A

GOSPEL

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Jesus said:

'I tell you most solemnly, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold through the gate, but gets in some other way is a thief and a brigand. The one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the flock; the gatekeeper lets him in, the sheep hear his voice, one by one he calls his own sheep and leads them out. When he has brought out his flock, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow because they know his voice. They never follow a stranger but run away from him: they do not recognise the voice of strangers.'

Jesus told them this parable but they failed to understand what he meant by telling it to them.

So Jesus spoke to them again:

'I tell you most solemnly,
I am the gate of the sheepfold.
All others who have come
are thieves and brigands;
but the sheep took no notice of them.
I am the gate.
Anyone who enters through me will be safe:
he will go freely in and out
and be sure of finding pasture.
The thief comes
only to steal and kill and destroy.
I have come
so that they may have life and have it to the full.'

(John 10:1-10)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- In ancient times, shepherds and their sheep wandered in search of pasture, often travelling many miles. At night, the shepherd would build an enclosure to keep his sheep together and safe from predators. Often he would form a human gate by sleeping at the entry to the enclosure.
- The words *pastor* and *pastoral* come from the Latin word for 'shepherd'.
- This is one of seven sayings of Jesus in John's Gospel known as the 'I am' sayings. In John, this wording is an indication of the divinity of Jesus because it echoes the sacred name of God revealed to Moses: 'I am who am' (Exodus 3:14).

EXPLORING THE WORD

In the Gospel of John, we do not find parables in the traditional sense. They are not a literary device that John employs, but this text is as close an approximation to a parable as we have. The contrast he draws between the shepherd who enters the fold by the gate and the thieves and brigands who seek to enter another way is really about leadership. There are good leaders and bad leaders. The good leader of God's people must come to them through Jesus, who is the gate. The thieves and brigands will only lead the people to fear and confusion, where they will be scattered. Perhaps John is addressing a situation in his community where those who are seeking leadership are not following the voice of Jesus but seeking their own aggrandisement or following their own agenda. Such people will ultimately lead the flock to destruction, but Jesus gives life in abundance to all who know his voice and follow him as shepherd.

- What false voices can be heard in our world today?
- What message do they proclaim that is different from the message of Jesus?
- What are the things that make it difficult to resist the false voices in our world?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What does it mean to you to have 'life to the full'?
- Where is the voice of Christ calling you to go?
- Share together some reflections on people you have known who have been a guide and a protector to you. Try to describe the positive attributes they had and how they used these gifts in caring for others.
- When you pray this week, pray before an image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Be a protector of someone in need of help this week.
- Psalm 22 (23) is one of the best loved and most well-known psalms. Try to learn it by heart and recite it often this week:

*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.*

