

4th Sunday of Easter, Year A

GOSPEL

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Jesus said, 'I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd is one who lays down his life for his sheep. The hired man, since he is not the shepherd and the sheep do not belong to him, abandons the sheep and runs away as soon as he sees a wolf coming, and then the wolf attacks and scatters the sheep; this is because he is only a hired man and has no concern for the sheep.

I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep.

And there are other sheep I have that are not of this fold, and these I have to lead as well. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be only one flock, and one shepherd.

The Father loves me because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me; I lay it down of my own free will, and as it is in my power to lay it down, so it is in my power to take it up again; and this is the command I have been given by my Father.'

(John 10:11-18)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The Latin word for shepherd is the root of the word pastor, which is often used to describe the priest who leads the community.
- From this Latin root, we also derive other terms such as pastoral associate, pastoral council and pastoral care, all of which imply a duty of love and care towards others.
- Bishops carry a staff known as a crosier, which is the shepherd's crook and a symbol of the care of the bishop for his people.
- John's Gospel will be read for some weeks during this period. John is the latest of the written gospels, probably being composed at the very end of the first century.

EXPLORING THE WORD

King David had been a shepherd as a boy, so the image of the Shepherd Messiah underlies this text. But the intimacy of Jesus' relationship with his flock goes beyond even this. This gospel is a statement of the seriousness of Jesus' commitment to the Father's will and his self-giving love for humankind. Jesus' life is freely given for his flock. It is sometimes thought that Jesus died to satisfy the will of the Father imposed on the Son. This is not so. Jesus' gift was a free gift because he responded at all times to that which was most profound in him: the Father's love, which he wished to make known to the world. It is generous, self-giving love for others.

- In what ways are Christians today called to offer this same self-giving love for others?
- Who are those in our world who are most in need of this generous love?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Who have been the shepherds in your life who have guided and protected you?
- What or who are the 'wolves' that threaten and cause fear?
- Share memories of times when you were given special responsibility to care for something or for someone.
- Who are the people who rely on your care? Extend that care in special ways this week.
- Use the opening lines of Psalm 23 this week:

*The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.
Fresh and green are the pastures where he gives me
repose.*

By quiet waters he leads me to revive my soul.

