

Fourth Sunday of Easter



Entering the Easter Mystery

O God most merciful,
you who gave us the Lamb,
guide us to eternal springs.
You who promise
to end hunger and thirst,
wiping away every tear from our eyes,
have compassion on us
who don't yet see the compelling vision,
whose humanity limits our sight.
Help us enter your Easter mystery
and look forward to your coming
in glory.

We ask this through our Lord,
Jesus Christ,
your Son, who lives and reigns
with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Sunday, April 21, 2013

“No One Shall Snatch Them Out of My Hands”



Today's Readings: Acts 13:14, 43–52; Psalm 100:1–2, 3, 5, (3c); Revelation 7:9, 14b–17; John 10:27–30. We may have difficulty with the Good Shepherd analogy, just as Jesus's first listeners did. They protested, “If you are the Messiah, tell us so in plain words!” (10:24). So we may chafe at the metaphor, especially when it seems to insult us. “We're smart, independent, modern, sophisticated. *Please* don't call us sheep!”

As if in response to our discomfort, today's Gospel delves more deeply into the relationship between Christ and his followers. Regardless of what metaphor we use, there is a deep understanding between the two, a reciprocal sympathy, a bond that surpasses any words attempting to describe it. The Shepherd knows his sheep profoundly and the sheep hear his

voice. To make this mystery even deeper, the followers participate in the bond between the Father and the Son.

Jesus's promise that “no one shall snatch them out of my hand” takes on special meaning when we stumble into dire circumstances: lying in an ambulance or hospital bed, waiting for the results of biopsy or CAT scan, sitting guiltily in court, receiving notices from the bank that checks have bounced, hearing heart-stopping news. All these—and worse—are bound to happen. But God can never be false to the assurance that we are still held safely. We may fail, sicken, and eventually die, but nothing pulls us from the shelter of God's hand. God cannot stop loving us and giving us life.



This Week at Home

Monday, April 22

Celebration and Care of the Planet

The pastoral tone of today's Good Shepherd readings coincides nicely with Earth Day. We are God's honored guests on the planet earth. Have we responded with careful stewardship of our beautiful home? The website www.earthday.org can suggest "a billion acts of green," ranging from preschoolers planting gardens to a rain barrel for water. One possibility it lists is to park in a central spot, then walk to several errands. Or, leave the car in the garage and bicycle instead. Today's Readings: Acts 11:1–18; Psalm 42:2–3; 43:3, 4 (see 3a); John 10:1–10.

Tuesday, April 23

St. George, Martyr and Saint Adalbert, Bishop and Martyr

Today's reading from Acts ends with the line, "and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called 'Christians.'" Think about what it means to bear that name. Surely one characteristic is the trust Jesus expresses in today's Gospel, "No one will snatch them out of my hand" (10:28). St. George is famous for the legend of slaying the dragon, which must have sprung from some bold courage that also characterizes Christians. St. Adalbert, who advocated unpopular clerical reform, must have believed he moved within Christ's hands even as he endured exile. Today's Readings: Acts 11:19–26; Psalm 87:1b–3, 4–5, 6–7 (117:1a); John 10:22–30.

Wednesday, April 24

St. Fidelis of Sigmaringen

In today's passage from John, Jesus encourages us: "for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world" (12:47). In Acts 13:4, Paul and Barnabas believe they are "sent out by the Holy Spirit" on their mission. St. Fidelis must have believed both ideas at his core. They gave him courage to preach against Calvinists in Switzerland, which led eventually to his martyrdom in 1622. Today's Readings: Acts 12:24—13:5a; Psalm 67:2–3, 5, 6 and 8 (4); John 12:44–50.

Thursday, April 25

Saint Mark, Evangelist

When a president, movie star, or other public figure dies, many stories circulate about the person—all with varying degrees of truth. We can thank St. Mark for writing in Greek the first stories of Jesus, before AD 70, so we'd have a more consistent, integrated version of his life. Like Peter who mentions Mark in his letter, (1 Peter 5:13), the evangelist stood fast in the true grace of God. Today's Readings: 1 Peter 5:5b–14; Psalm 89:2–3, 6–7, 16–17 (2); Mark 16:15–20.

Friday, April 26

We're In the Picture Too

In today's passage from Acts, Peter says, "we bring you the good news that what God promised to our ancestors he has fulfilled for us" (13:32–33). Fra Angelico, the Italian painter beatified in 1982, painted frescoes of the lives of Mary and Jesus. He always included in them people dressed like the Dominicans who would view the paintings. He expected viewers to place themselves in the fresco. Borrowing this idea, we could see ourselves standing by the empty tomb of Jesus, or waiting in terror behind locked doors. Try this imaginative exercise with an Easter Gospel reading. Today's Readings: Acts 13:26–33; Psalm 2:6–7, 8–9, 10–11ab (7bc); John 14:1–6.

Saturday, April 27

Filled with the Holy Spirit

When Paul and Barnabas preached to Gentiles, it must have been hugely perplexing and insulting to their brother Jews. What else would compel them to incite persecution and drive the disciples away? The episode should remind us that faith is never our exclusive possession, but is intended to be shared. The Gentiles are delighted to be welcomed. How did the disciples react to venom, rage, and exile? They "were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (13:52). Today's Readings: Acts 13:44–52; Psalm 98:1, 2–3ab, 3cd–4 (3cd); John 14:7–14.

