

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

Fourth Sunday of Easter—Year B

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Reading 1

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 Nazorean
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."

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 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.

Reading 2

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.

Alleluia

John 10:14

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

I am the good shepherd, says the Lord;
I know my sheep, and mine know me.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

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."

Exegesis

Acts 4:8-12

The setting of our reading today from the fourth chapter of the *Acts of the Apostles* is of course incredibly early in the life of the Church. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit of Pentecost has empowered the apostles. After his great speech at Pentecost, Peter along with John were going up to the temple area and were confronted by a crippled beggar. Instead of giving him the silver or gold that he was seeking, in the name of Jesus the Risen Lord, the apostles healed the man. For this and for their words of preaching they were arrested and imprisoned overnight. Now it is morning, and they were brought before the leaders, the elders, and the scribes. Annas, the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and all who were of the high priestly class were assembled along with the crowd. The setting is reminiscent of the trial of Jesus. Now the apostles are on trial.

The verse that immediately follows our pericope today is telling: “Observing the boldness of Peter and John and perceiving them as uneducated, ordinary men, they were amazed, and they recognized them as companions of Jesus.” (Acts 4:13) The power of the Holy Spirit was evident working in and through the apostles. The cripple who was healed was standing in their midst. The crowds were being moved and converted.

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, is preaching a Gospel of healing and salvation. The words, *saved*, *salvation*, and *healed* appear numerous times in the short five verse Scripture passage. The Greek word that Luke uses for salvation is σωτηρία (*soteria*) which means to be delivered or preserved from harm. As it evolves in the New Testament it describes the event that consummates the salvation of God’s people: the return of Christ and the redemption of our bodies.

Often in the New Testament salvation is described as spiritual restoration and healing (Matt 13:15; 1 Pet 2:24; Titus 2:14; 1 John 1:7). Through the sacrifice of Christ, the illness of sin is healed, and the Christian is restored to a state of righteousness and wholeness before God.¹

Another Greek word used often to speak of salvation is σώζω (*sōzō*). vb. **to save, make well.** *To save or deliver someone from harm or illness.* The term *sōzō* is a common one in the NT and frequently describes deliverance from both physical death and sin. People with various illnesses long to touch Jesus’ garment, thinking that doing so will cause them to be “saved” (*sōzō*), clearly meaning “healed” (e.g., Matt 9:21–22, Mark 6:56). Elsewhere, those who had been possessed by demons are described as “healed” (*sōzō*; Luke 8:36), and other acts of healing are referred to as saving (*sōzō*; Mark 10:52; Luke 17:19; Acts 4:9)²

The Latin word used to describe salvation is *salvus* which means to heal. We derive the English word *salve* from *salvus*. The physical healings that Jesus performs and subsequently the apostles perform, are symbolic of a deeper healing that is needed. It is a restoration of wholeness that is necessary when we are separated from God. Salvation is the restoration of that division caused by sin.

1. Chris Byrley, [“Healing.”](#) ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

2. Chris Byrley, [“Healing.”](#) ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

Exegesis (Continued)

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

Psalm 118 is described as an individual song of thanksgiving. The great victory song of the Israelites as they are freed from Egyptian slavery is echoed in verse 28. This Psalm is a celebration of victory, the victory of salvation that comes from the hand of God.

“The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone.” Probably an ancient proverb. A piece of stone judged unworthy of a position of prominence in the structure by the “experts” has become the most prominent. In the present context this may refer to the king’s rise to power or his recent victory. This text is very important in the early church’s attempt to understand the rejection and execution of Jesus by His people. (cf. Matt 21:42; Acts 4:11; 1 Cor 3:11; Eph 2:20; 1 Pet 2:7-8)³ Peter in our first reading today from *Acts*, as he and John are being rejected by the religious leaders, reminds those same leaders that they rejected Jesus the author of life and the Savior of the world.

1 John 3:1-2

John, the beloved disciple, knew the heart and mind of Jesus as well as any human being save Mary and Joseph. He was a soul mate of Jesus. John sees clearly the contrast between good and evil, between light and darkness, between knowledge and ignorance, between faith and error, and between children of God and children of Satan. John echoes the words of Jesus at the Last Supper when He calls us to remain in His love, His indwelling presence. It is precisely this abiding presence of the Risen Lord that makes us children of God, His sons and daughters, brothers and sisters in Christ.

John describes three attributes of God’s children. The first is that they do not belong to this world in the sense of being owned or controlled by worldly things. St Paul would describe it as being in the world but not of the world. The second attribute of God’s children is living a life of holiness in Christ. St Paul would best describe it as putting on the heart and the mind of Christ. The third attribute of God’s children is that of hope. God’s children live a life of hope, a hope that lies in the Risen Lord, a hope in the promise of salvation and life eternal.

The Our Father prayer is so familiar to us that we easily miss the deep significance of it. Jesus was asked by his apostles to teach them to pray. Jesus instructed them, “Pray Our Father...” In those beautiful words Jesus is inviting us into a familial relationship as his brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of the Father.

3. The New Jerome Biblical Commentary; Prentice Hall; Brown, Fitzmyer, Murphy; Page 547.

Exegesis (Continued)

John 10:11-18

The Image of God as shepherd first appears in Genesis Chapter 49, “But each one’s bow remains stiff, as their arms are were unsteady, by the power of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel, the God of your father, who helps you. God Almighty, who helps you.” (Gen 49:24-25) Then there is the famous 23rd Psalm, “The Lord is my Shepherd...”

The Prophet Jeremiah saw the Exile coming. He writes: “Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture says the Lord. Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, against the shepherds who shepherd me people: You have scattered my sheep and driven them away. You have not cared for them, but I will take care to punish your evil deeds. I Myself will gather the remnant of my flock from all the lands to which I have driven them and bring them back to their meadow:” (Jer 23:1-3)

The image of the shepherd is also prominent in the Prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel is writing during the time of the Exile. The Israelite people are scattered in the great diaspora, they are left to wander throughout the Middle East. While the leaders were carried off in captivity the populous was left to scatter. The Prophet is exposing the failures of leadership. Ezekiel 34 castigates the leaders of the people as bad shepherds who fatten themselves at the cost of the sheep. The sheep are left wandering and scattered as prey for the wolves (34:1-10). The Lord promises to go and gather His sheep, who are scattered throughout the lands, and bring them back to good pasture (34:11-16). Ezekiel concludes this chapter with the affirmation that the people will come to know God in this activity: “And they will know that I AM (ego eimi) the Lord their God and they, the house of Israel, are My people, says the Lord. You are the sheep and the sheep of My pasture, and I AM the Lord your God. (34: 30-31)³

Jesus states clearly in one of His great I AM statements. I AM (ego eimi) the Good Shepherd. (I AM (ego eimi) is a reference to Exodus 3:14 where God reveals Himself as I AM, in Hebrew (ehyeh aser ehyeh), as God whose nature is to be, or as being itself) Jesus is clearly identifying Himself as God. The promise of God to shepherd His people is now fulfilled in Jesus. In contrast to the bad shepherds of Israel, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who will lay down His life for the sheep. There is now ONE Shepherd and one flock. There is no other gateway to salvation. There is only ONE. And Jesus prayed at the Last Supper, “Father may they be one as You and I are ONE.” (Jn 17:22).

4. The New Jerome Biblical Commentary; Brown, Fitzmyer, Murphy; Prentice Hall; p. 968.

Reflection

This weekend we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday. The Good Shepherd is my favorite image of Jesus. When I made my first communion my grandmother gave me a beautiful print of Jesus sitting on a rock with a little lamb in His arms and a flock of sheep attentively gazing at him. The print still hangs in my bedroom at our family home. It is only a print, and it has little value as the world might measure value, but to me it is priceless. It is an image of Jesus that is indelibly fixed in my mind's eye. Even today when I pray, the image is there. Often in my life I have felt Jesus holding me in His arms as a lost sheep that is found.

The image of the Good Shepherd became prominent in sacred scripture during the time of the Exile. The Jewish leaders were carried off to Babylon in captivity and most of the people were scattered all over the country as Jerusalem was destroyed. We have the promise of God through the Prophet Ezekiel, "I Myself will shepherd My people." (Ez 34:15) Jesus proclaims in our Gospel this weekend, "I AM the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." (Jn 10:11) The promise of God is now fulfilled in Jesus.

As powerful as the image is, it is strangely missing from Christian art for the first four or five centuries. Perhaps it is because it had such a negative image in the ancient world. A shepherd would live on the open range with the sheep for months at a time. Consequently, they would take on the smell of the sheep. When they came into the towns they were avoided and shunned. Many shepherds for hire carried with them a reputation for being dishonest and self-serving. In a word, there were many bad shepherds.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He will lay down His life for the sheep. The purpose of the shepherd is in fact the life of the sheep. The verse before our Gospel this weekend is one of my favorites, John 10:10. Jesus says, "I came so that you might have life and have life to the fullest." How long would a sheep survive on the open range without the protection of a shepherd? Not a shepherd for hire who would abandon the sheep at the first sign of a hungry wolf, but a good shepherd who would stand in the face of death, and in fact die for the life of His sheep.

The promise of God is in fact fulfilled in Jesus the Good Shepherd. The questions are: Do we belong to His flock? Do we know and are we able to recognize the voice of the Shepherd in our lives? Are we willing to follow that voice through the dark valleys of this world? Are we willing to allow Him to guide us to green pastures and restful waters? Our life, our eternal life depends on our answer to those questions.

We need a shepherd as never before in human history. We live in a world darkened by evil, a world with many conflicting voices. There are many wolves in sheep's clothing seeking to derail us from the fulfillment that comes from a relationship with the Good Shepherd. I pray that each one of us will grow in our personal relationship with Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love.
Amen

In Jesus the Good Shepherd,



Personal Witness

My maternal grandparents owned and operated a small dairy farm. They raised ten children on that farm, my mother and her nine brothers. The farm was near to the home where I was raised which allowed me to spend many days of my youth on the farm. When I was very young my grandfather in addition to a menagerie of other animals had a small herd of sheep. Observing his interactions with the sheep has made the image of Jesus the Good Shepherd vivid and real for me.

By the sound of his voice and his call both the dairy cattle and the sheep would respond. One day as it was time for the evening milking, grandpa asked me if I would call the cows. I was about 6 or 7 years old. I stood exactly where he always stood and bellowed his exact chant which I had come to know. The cows continued grazing and did not budge. After about ten long minutes I was losing my voice. Grandpa came out, with a big grin on his face, and with one loud call with his deep voice the cows began their way to the barn.

The sheep responded to his voice in the same way. They knew his voice and they had come to learn that to follow his voice meant greener pastures and fresh water and safety. At times in the spring during lambing season the flock would be harassed by coyotes. He had a coral for the sheep next to the barn. He would coral them at night to keep them safe. Late in the evening he would go out into the pasture singing some silly song and they would follow him through the gate into the coral. My job was to close the narrow gate when they were all safely inside. At times I was allowed to camp out with him near the coral so that we could chase off the coyotes when they came calling.

One day in early spring the grass was starting to green near the riverbank. As this was the first of the green grass the sheep were happily grazing. I was with my grandpa as we led them to the river. As they were struggling for position a newborn lamb was accidentally nudged into the river. The river was swift and cold, ice was breaking up and floating down stream. Grandpa instinctively ran down the riverbank and plunged in ahead of the drowning frightened lamb. He waded chest deep in the freezing water to save the little lamb. He wrapped the lamb in his coat, and we started the mile walk to the farmhouse. When we arrived, he wrapped the little lamb in an old blanket and placed it in front of the woodstove. I remember my grandmother chastising him, screaming at him to get out of his wet clothes. She reminded him how foolish he was to risk his own life, the chance of catching pneumonia, to save one little lamb.

I am certain that grandpa did not think that one through. He reacted and did what came natural to him, protecting the life of his sheep. Without his care, the defenseless sheep could not have survived very long. They needed a shepherd to protect them from predators, to lead them to green pastures to eat and to restful waters to drink. Their lives depended on the care of their shepherd. The shepherd in turn has one purpose, the life of his sheep.

I will always cherish the memories of my grandfather on the farm and the lessons learned about life and about God. For the gift of these experiences, I am eternally grateful.

Fr Glenn