

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)

The Fourth Sunday of Easter—Year C

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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 - C

Reading 1

Acts 13:14, 43-52

Paul and Barnabas continued on from Perga and reached Antioch in Pisidia. On the sabbath they entered the synagogue and took their seats. Many Jews and worshipers who were converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to remain faithful to the grace of God.

On the following sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and with violent abuse contradicted what Paul said. Both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first, but since you reject it and condemn yourselves as unworthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, *I have made you a light to the Gentiles, that you may be an instrument of salvation to the ends of the earth.*"

The Gentiles were delighted when they heard this and glorified the word of the Lord. All who were destined for eternal life came to believe, and the word of the Lord continued to spread through the whole region. The Jews, however, incited the women of prominence who were worshipers and the leading men of the city, stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their territory. So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them, and went to Iconium. The disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 100:1-2, 3, 5

R.(3c) **We are his people, the sheep of his flock.**

Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands;
serve the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful song.
R. **We are his people, the sheep of his flock.**

Know that the LORD is God;
he made us, his we are;
his people, the flock he tends.
R. We are his people, the sheep of his flock.

The LORD is good:
his kindness endures forever,
and his faithfulness, to all generations.
R. We are his people, the sheep of his flock.

Reading 2

Revelation 7:9, 14b-17

I, John, had a vision of a great multitude,
which no one could count,
from every nation, race, people, and tongue.
They stood before the throne and before the Lamb,
wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands.

Then one of the elders said to me,
“These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress;
they have washed their robes
and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

“For this reason they stand before God’s throne
and worship him day and night in his temple.
The one who sits on the throne will shelter them.
They will not hunger or thirst anymore,
nor will the sun or any heat strike them.
For the Lamb who is in the center of the throne
will shepherd them
and lead them to springs of life-giving water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

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 10:27-30

Jesus said:

“My sheep hear my voice;

I know them, and they follow me.

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.

No one can take them out of my hand.

My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all,
and no one can take them out of the Father’s hand.

The Father and I are one.”

Exegesis

Acts 13:14, 43-52

“Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers... While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then completing their fasting and prayer, they laid hands on them and sent them off. So, they, sent forth by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and from there sailed to Cyprus.” (Acts 13: 1-3). Thus began the first missionary journey of Paul.

As our selected passage begins Paul and Barnabas are now in Antioch in Pisidia, not to be confused with the town of Antioch of Syria from which they began their journey. Antioch of Pisidia was a city in southern Galatia. It was the home of a large Jewish community that formed during the Diaspora. Paul and Barnabas have entered the Jewish Synagogue where Paul delivers his inaugural address to the gathering which consisted of both Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, e.g., “So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, ‘Men of Israel and you that fear God, listen.’” (Acts 13: 16).

Paul proceeded to deliver a powerful sermon beginning with the history of the God’s saving hand in Israelite history. From the line of David, Paul introduces Jesus as the fulfilment of God’s plan: “Yahweh said, ‘I have found in David, the son of Jesse, a man after my heart, who will do all my will.’ Of this man’s posterity God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as He promised.” (Acts 13: 22-23). Paul’s moving words brought much joy and excitement among the people and jealousy among many Jewish leaders, as the crowd begged Paul and Barnabas to return on the following Sabbath, such that now nearly the entire town would turn out.

The Israelite People considered themselves to be chosen. Yahweh would affirm this and clearly state His intentions on numerous occasions, e.g., “Today we are making this agreement with the Lord: He is to be your God, and you are to walk in His ways and observe His statutes, commandments and decrees, and harken to His voice. And today the Lord is making this agreement with you: you are to be a people peculiarly His own.” (Deut 26: 17-18). St. Paul reminds the people that they were also chosen by God for a purpose as he quotes from the Prophet Isaiah: “I will make you a light to the nations, that My salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.” (Is 49: 6).

The universal promise of salvation brought great delight to the Gentile crowds. Many of the Jewish people, especially the leaders took exception to this, as it required a shift in their way of thinking that had been entrenched in their customs over the centuries. Avoidance and segregation from pagan people and cultures was common. It was customary to shake the dust off of their feet as they left Gentile territory returning to Jewish lands. Ironically, as they are rejected by the religious leaders, Paul and Barnabas shake the dust from their feet as they now move on.

Recall that this is something that Jesus instructed the disciples to do when they faced rejection: “Whoever will not receive you or listen to your words, go outside that house or town and shake the dust from your feet.” Jesus is stressing the importance of continuing to proclaim the word, and not to dwell on rejection.

Exegesis (Continued)

Psalm 100:1-2, 3, 5

Psalm 100 is a short psalm that consists of just five verses. It is recognized as a processional hymn for a religious ceremony. The psalmist introduces the theme in verse one as, *A Psalm of Thanksgiving*.

The psalm is inviting all people to join in joyful song of praise and thanksgiving to God. In doing so, the psalm in acknowledging that all people are God's people. *Know that the Lord is God, our maker to whom we belong, whose people we are, God's well-tended flock*. The first part of this verse echoes the Prophet Isaiah: "Yet, O Lord, You are our Father; we are the clay and You the potter: we are all the work of Your hands." (Is 64: 7). The final phrase of the verse is similar to Micah 7: 14: "Shepherd Your people with Your staff, the flock of Your inheritance." Whereas the *flock* that Yahweh promises to shepherd is typically in reference to the Israelite people, its usage here seems more universal in nature, as all people have God as their creator.

All are called to enter the temple Gates, i.e., to approach God, with praise and thanksgiving for God's enduring love and faithfulness. *The LORD is good: his kindness endures forever, and his faithfulness, to all generations*. The Hebrew word that is translated here as *kindness*, is *hesed*. *Hesed* is one of the most common words used to describe God. *Hesed* is also translated as *steadfast love, enduring mercy, goodness, kindness, faithfulness* and *rock*. There is an element of immutability and endurance within the connotation of the word. *Hesed* speaks of the steadfast unchangeable love and mercy that describes who God is. The psalmist is calling upon all of humankind to give thanks to God for this steadfast enduring love. The psalm is calling for an outward communal expression of gratitude.

Exegesis (Continued)

Revelation 7:9, 14b-17

I, John, had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. The vision of John now moves from an earthly vision earlier in Chapter 7 to a heavenly vision. John now has a vision of the Church Triumphant gathered around the throne of God and the Lamb. The great multitude, like the 144,000 mentioned earlier, represents a gathering of souls too large to count. It fulfills the promise of God to Abram: “He took him outside and said, ‘Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so,’ He added, ‘shall your descendants be.’” (Gen 15: 5). Likewise, the fact that they come from many nations also fulfills the promise of God to Abram: “No longer shall you be called Abram; your name shall be Abraham, for I am making you father of a host of nations.” (Gen 17: 5).

They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. God is seated on the throne and this passage echoes the vision of the Prophet Daniel with myriads of angels ministering to Him: “Thrones were set up and the Ancient One took his throne. His clothing was snow bright, and the hair on his head as white as wool; His throne was flames of fire, with wheels of burning fire. A surging stream of fire flowed out from where he sat; thousands upon thousands ministered to him and myriads upon myriads attended him.” (Dan 7: 9-10).

Throughout *Revelation* the throne of God and the throne of the Lamb are treated as one. In his closing vision John writes of heaven: “The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.” (Rev 22: 3).

The palm branches were used in the celebration of a great military victory such as described in I Maccabees: “The Jews entered the citadel with shouts of jubilation, waving palm branches... because a great enemy of Israel has been destroyed.” (1 Mac 13: 51).

“These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. The time of distress echoes the prophesy of Daniel: “Of the wise men, some shall fall, so that the rest may be tested, refined and purified, until the end of time which is still appointed to come.” (Dan 12: 35). The purification of the robes reminds us of the ancient purification ritual instituted by Moses: “Taking some of the anointing oil and some of the blood that was on the altar, Moses sprinkled with it Aaron and his vestments, as well as his sons and their vestments, thus consecrating both Aaron and his vestments and his sons and their vestments.” (Lev 8: 30). It is now the blood of the Lamb and the blood of the martyrs that is purifying. The paradox of the Cross is revealed in the paradox of blood turning the robes pure white.

The death of the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep on Good Friday does not end the metaphor of the Shepherd. Now the Lamb of God and God are one on the throne. The Lamb has taken His place at the right hand of the Father. He continues to shepherd His beloved from His throne in Heaven and in and through His Church here on earth.

Exegesis (Continued)

John 10:27-30

While today's passage continues the *Good Shepherd* theme of Chapter Ten, it occurs at a later time. The occasion is the annual feast of the *Dedication of the Temple* also known as *Hannukkah*. It is a celebration that was initiated in 164 B.C.E. Under the rule of Antiochus, the people were forced to worship the pagan god Zeus Olympio. On the 15th of Chislev in 167 the temple was desecrated with a sacrifice to Zeus. This abomination continued for three years. A Jewish revolt led by the priest Mattathias and his son Judas eventually led to their emancipation from the Syrian occupation. The Holy of Holies was renovated and rededicated to Yahweh on the 25th of Chislev in the year 164. *Dedication* evolved into an annual observance. Chislev is the ninth month of the Jewish calendar and falls in November-December within the modern-day Greco-Roman calendar. It was winter.

We are told that Jesus was walking in the portico of Solomon which is on the East side of the temple. The portico of Solomon was the only area of the temple that remained intact after the temple was destroyed by the Babylonians. Jesus who will reveal Himself as the New Temple of God is standing in the original temple area. The celebration of *Dedication* is a celebration of God's presence. Now Jesus is standing in the temple and the people do not recognize Him as God's presence.

The image of the Good Shepherd is a metaphor of the relationship between God and His beloved children. The purpose of the Shepherd is the life and the care of the sheep. The Jewish leaders and the faithful would have been keenly aware of the promise of Yahweh to shepherd His people: "I, Myself, will shepherd My people." (Ez 34: 15). Jesus states clearly that He is the fulfillment of that promise of God when He reveals Himself as the Good Shepherd and that He and the Father are one.

On the open range there were often numerous flocks and shepherds sharing grazing land. It was imperative that the shepherd know his sheep. It was also important that the sheep recognize the voice of their shepherd. The shepherd would often walk along calling his sheep. Only his flock would follow, thus separating themselves from the other grazing sheep. It was about a mutual relationship, and so the metaphor speaks powerfully of our need to come to know the voice of the shepherd and to follow that voice. That voice will lead us through the gates of Heaven.

God reveals Himself as the savior and we are safe in His hands. "It is I, I the Lord; there is no savior but Me. It is I who foretold, I who saved; I made it known, not any strange god among you; you are my witnesses, says the Lord. I am God, yes from eternity I am He; there is none who can deliver from my hand; who can countermand what I do?" (Is 43: 11-13). "But the souls of the just are in the hands of God." (Wis 3: 1). "I alone, am God, and there is no god besides Me... and from My hand there is no rescue." (Deut 32: 39).

Our response to God our savior is to come to know, to hear, and to follow, in order to possess eternal life. A believer *hears* (1:41; 3:8, 29; 4:41; 5:24, 28; 6:45; 8:38, 43; 10:3, 16) has *eternal life* (3:15, 16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 40, 47, 54, 68) *follows* Jesus (1:37, 44; 8:12; 10:4, 5) and *is not lost* (3:16; 6:12, 27, 39; 10:10).¹

1. Harrington; Sacra Pagina Series-The Gospel of John; L.P.; Collegeville, MN; page 315.

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. Many times in my life I have felt Jesus holding me in His arms as a lost sheep now found.

The image of God as 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 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 a lot of 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 answers to those questions.

I personally feel that 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.

I would like to share with you the prayer that I chose for my ordination card 26 years ago. "May the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the eternal covenant, Jesus the Lord, furnish you with all that is good, that you may do His will. May He carry out in you what is pleasing to Him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." (Heb 13:20-21).



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. My great uncle also had a dairy farm that was closer to our family home, and I spent many hours working on his farm. Consequently, the images that Jesus uses often relative to farming and agriculture have always been particularly vivid for me.

As a young child I would often follow my grandfather around the farm, and I observed him closely. 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 bel-
lowed 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. They had come to know his voice and they knew that oats were waiting for them and so they responded.

My job that evening was to ration out oats to each of the cows in their stalls as grandpa worked on the other end. They all received a short ration of grain and hay that evening as I retaliated for their inattention to my calls.

One day in early spring the grass was starting to green near the riverbank. As this was the first of the green grass the cows were happily grazing. I was with my grandpa as we led them to the river. As they were struggling for position a newborn calf accidentally was 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 calf. He waded waist deep in the freezing water to save the little newborn. He wrapped the calf in his coat, and we started the mile walk to the barn. When we arrived, he wrapped the little calf in an old blanket and grandpa gave me a bottle of milk and had me feed the young calf.

Later as we went back to the farmhouse, I remember my grandmother chastising him, urging 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 calf.

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 cows. Without his care, the defenseless young calf could not have survived very long. Like sheep, cows need 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 flock.

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.

