

Fourth Sunday of Easter – May 12, 2019 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: 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.

Psalm: Ps 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.

Scripture Reading: 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."

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."



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the gospel be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

Think of the endearing way domestic beasts recognize their owners. Dogs collapse into a frenzy of delight when you come home, even if you have been gone for just ten minutes. The new heaven has arrived in their midst and hysterics are the least they can do. There are cats like this somewhere, but mostly your house cats have an opposite reaction from the heartsick dogs. “Oh it’s you again,” they seem to say, bored. I do know one exception. My cousin’s cat always modeled indifference with most people, but when I walked into the house it made a quiet bee-line to where I took a seat, making no secret of how it enjoyed being petted by me. I have never been sure whether to be complimented or not, nor can I explain it. There might be months between visits and still it makes its way to the petting machine, with both dignity and craving. Jesus, judging from his stories, also paid a lot of attention to animals. He had watched shepherds and sheep many times in his trips through the lands and he observed their kinship, one for the other. It was not cat-like or dog-like, but nevertheless it was heartfelt. Shepherds made the sheep safe, guarded them, and led them to food and drink. Jesus even compared a milling crowd of people to “sheep without a shepherd” (Mt 9:36). I have been told that in the Jerusalem of Jesus’ day various flocks would arrive along with their respective shepherds, but that there was only one sheepfold (the pen for sheep), so all the shepherds sent all the sheep into it. This made for a rather large herd overall, and there wasn’t a practice of branding or marking in order to tell one from the other. What’s more, sheep, unlike dogs, do not rejoice themselves into knots when their shepherd walks in. Then how could each shepherd reclaim its own sheep?

Two ways. First, the shepherd knew them by heart. Sometimes he had a special name for each character in the flock. And second, the sheep themselves recognized their master’s voice immediately. When he called out, they simply got to their feet and came with him, through the sheep-gate. Jesus refers to this familiarity in Sunday’s short Gospel reading. “My sheep hear my voice; I know them and they know me,” he says. Haven’t you ever longed to hear the voice of someone who could make things alright, who could lift the burdens from your shoulders? Someone who knows you by name and loves you? Jesus says he is that someone. You “shall never perish,” he adds, as he holds you in his own hands. It is the Father who has given you to Jesus. Who could revoke that gift? I have a hunch that you do recognize Jesus’ voice when you hear it. Your feelings move when you hear trustingly a certain gospel, for instance. Or when you receive the bread of everlasting life and the cup of unending salvation—not as a stranger might, but as a member of the well-fed and greatly cared for flock. What about trying, this Sunday, to notice whether your spirit inclines to Jesus? Maybe you settle into his lap for care. Your soul seeks him always. And he finds you.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Were Paul and Barnabas instruments of salvation? Are you such an instrument in any way? How? What did they do when they met with opposition? Is there any situation where “shaking the dust off your feet in protest” and moving on, might help you?
2. Do you need to hear that “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes,” or are those words for other people?
3. Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice.” Do you? Maybe in your heart? Or in homilies, or in the poor, or in people around you? In books, poems, nature? Any of the above? All of the above?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another’s openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Almighty ever-living God, lead us to a share in the joys of heaven, so that the humble flock may reach where the brave Shepherd has gone before. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

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Prayer to St. Michael

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the Devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly hosts, by the power of God, thrust into hell Satan, and all the evil spirits, who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen