

Fourth Sunday of Easter

May 7, 2006

Acts 4:8-12; 1 Jn 3:1-2; Jn 10:11-18

Homily: *Sister Carolyn McCormack, OP*

Imagine this: open hilly space, hundred of sheep grazing on the land, barking sheep dogs catching the strays and keeping the herd together and a strong young man riding through their midst, tiny lambs in his saddlebags and a weak lying in front of him. His attentive manner sends a message that care and concern for the well-being of these sheep is his goal as he pursues the age-old profession of shepherding.

Not many of us have experiences with shepherds today. Unlike the listeners in Jesus' time, our images of shepherds come from stories, pictures, memories and experiences that are reflective of a rural life, a life away from the city, a life in other cultures, a life very different from that which most of us know. And, as in any profession that requires care and compassion, not all are considered good; some shepherds may be irresponsible and uncaring. Yet, the image is endearing and attractive; it captures our imagination.

In today's gospel, Jesus uses this image of the shepherd, so familiar to those gathered around him, to reveal a variety of insights about himself, his relationship with his Father and his mission of care and concern for all people. It is these insights, seen through the lens of the good shepherd that focus our attention. Quiet reflection draws us into the inner life of Jesus where we are privileged to witness his profound connection to the Father, his faithful mission of mercy and compassion, his unique and gracious gift of inclusion and the grace that provides the necessary strength to do the will of the Father. These insights about Jesus are revelatory and deeply moving. They show us the character of Jesus, his values and his powerful commitment to align himself with the Father, in order to bring the love of God to all, to extend the care and concern necessary to shepherd us, to lay down his life for us, to be our good shepherd.

What would our world look like viewed through that lens of the good shepherd? Are we convinced that Jesus' mystery of loving self-donation must be our mystery, also? In the 2nd reading, John calls each of us to take confidence in God's love for us. In Acts, Peter's profession of the power of the Spirit to bring healing and renewed life through Jesus' name gives us courage to accept Jesus' mission as our own. Through our baptism, we are, each one, God's beloved, called to extend God's message of saving care and compassion; through the outpouring of the Spirit we are able to bring that love to all our world.

May our good shepherd lead and guide us; may we know his voice and follow his path with courage and conviction.