

Wellspring Fransalian Center for Spirituality

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today, we begin the fourth week of Easter. Our Scripture readings of the past three weeks gave us inspiring and challenging thoughts, calling us to be Easter people. We listened to the many stories of the disciples of Jesus meeting their risen Lord and master and the amazing change and transformation that happened to them. We reflected on the promise that the Risen Lord made to his disciples that he would go ahead of them into Galilee and today into our own Galilees, to places and situations that we are called to go. We reflected on the mercy of God reaching out to the confused and frightened disciples of Jesus and to the early Christian community and making them free and unafraid. And we heard the Lord calling us to be merciful just as our heavenly father is merciful. And last Sunday, we heard the assurance of the Lord's peace and the call to be channels of peace for the world.

Today, the fourth Sunday of Easter is Good Shepherd Sunday. Our Scripture readings of today proclaim how tenderly and immensely God loves us and cares for us. The first reading speaks of Peter, who denied knowing Jesus, now filled with the Holy Spirit, boldly proclaiming that the preaching and healing were done in the name of Jesus and that salvation has come through Jesus. The responsorial Psalm calls all people, including the Gentiles to praise and proclaim God's enduring love. The author of the second reading tells us that we are God's very dear and beloved children. The Gospel proclaims Jesus as the good and caring shepherd who knows us, loves us, leads us, and lays down his life for us.

The image of the shepherd reflects a very caring, protective, selfless, self-sacrificing, and enduring relationship. The good shepherd knows the sheep and is known by the sheep. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep because he loves, cherishes, and values the sheep. One of the oldest images of God is "shepherd of souls." At the time of Jesus, the sheep had to graze in the narrow central plateau without protecting walls, where grass was sparse. The shepherd had to be ceaselessly and sleeplessly on the watch to protect the sheep from harm. This image of the shepherd reveals the unfailing vigilance and self-sacrificing love of God for us in Jesus. Our good shepherd, Jesus, in laying down his life for us, secured our safety and our salvation.

The Psalmist proclaimed, "The Lord is my shepherd" (Psalm 23). Now we can proclaim it even more boldly because the Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd" who is ready to lay down his life for us. What an amazing relationship between disciples and their master!!! How awesome it is that we have become cherished and prized objects of divine diligence, vigilance, and sacrifice!!!

The good shepherd spares no pains for the welfare of the sheep. We can look to our good shepherd with absolute confidence and devotion.

King David had been a shepherd and he knew how to care for the sheep and what it cost him. He became shepherd of his people. He had to figure out how he should care for them. He knew the sheep well and now he must come to know his people, their ways, their needs, their concerns, and their struggles. This problem gave him a new awareness of what God, the true shepherd, is like in his relationship to his people. Like a shepherd, God knows his people just as they are in all their need, in their stubbornness and stupidity as well as in their value and worth. Like a shepherd, God reaches out, searches out the lost and keeps them safe. Let us trust in Jesus who reveals to us the enduring, steadfast, loyal, unconquerable love of God, the good shepherd, who will never let us slip out of his hands!

One of the outstanding qualities of a shepherd is watchfulness. The Shepherd has to be alert, awake, attentive, vigilant, watchful..... He must nurture watchfulness. This is one of the qualities that Jesus calls all his followers to cultivate, especially those who are trusted with the care of others. Watchfulness is also one of the qualities that helps us develop healthy and mature relationship with people and enter into deeper relationship with God.

Spiritual maturity demands attentiveness... vigilance...watchfulness. Developing a healthy and wholesome spirituality is a lot like losing weight. It takes years to get into the shape that you want... but putting on unwanted weight seems to happen overnight - one slice of cheesecake could take 10 workouts down the drain!!! So, one must be watchful. You have to watch what you're taking into your body and how your body is reacting. Discernment, carefulness, discipline, and watchfulness are critical to becoming and remaining healthy physically. And so also with a healthy prayer life, sound spirituality as well as healthy relationships in families and communities. Be watchful.

It takes watchfulness to care well for those entrusted to our care; to teach sound doctrine, healthy values and morals; develop noble friendships and relationships..... It takes watchfulness to enable others to discover and correct their mistakes. It takes watchfulness to help others, especially our children, watch their lives (their career choices, decisions, parenting skills, spiritual disciplines, etc.) and their conduct (their doctrines, morals standards, views of the Church, God, Salvation, Grace, etc.).

I encourage you to take a few moments to be still and to reflect on nurturing the qualities of the good shepherd, especially watchfulness. Be mindful of Jesus, our good shepherd watching over you and be attentive to where he is leading you. Be watchful of who you are and whose you are and where you are going. May Jesus, our good shepherd, inspire you to be diligent, vigilant, and self-sacrificing just as he is!

God bless you and your family.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

Third Sunday of Easter

April 14, 2024

God is not a celestial policeman keeping law and order and looking out for lawbreakers. He is a shepherd seeking for the lost sheep, a woman searching for lost coins, a father waiting for his lost son and an all-embracing, self-sacrificing friend.

Collect

**May your people exult forever, O God,
in renewed youthfulness of spirit,
so that, rejoicing now in the restored glory of our adoption,
we may look forward in confident hope
to the rejoicing of the day of resurrection.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.**

Liturgy of the Word

Prayerfully read the first reading and then read my reflections below and spend a few moments of personal reflection. Do the same with Responsorial Psalm and other readings.

**Dear Lord, bless us with forbearance that we may patiently endure
our sufferings, burdens and shortcomings.**

Acts 4:8-12

Peter and John were arrested and put in jail for proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus. They were brought before the elders and the scribes and the high priests and questioned about the source of their authority and power for teaching and healing. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, boldly proclaimed that the preaching and healing were done in the name of Jesus and that salvation has come through Jesus.

Reflect on giving honor and glory to God for all the wonderful things he does in and through you.

Psalm 118

This is an all-embracing, universal, missionary Psalm inviting all people to thank God and proclaim His steadfast love. The Psalmist calls Israel (the people of God), the house of Aaron (the priestly class) and those who fear the Lord (the Gentile converts) – all people, including the Gentiles (heathens) to praise and proclaim God’s enduring love. The Church has been singing this Psalm at Easter as it is an all-inclusive Psalm, inviting all people, including the Gentile proselytes to praise God.

**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.

1 John 3:1-2

The author of this letter tells us that we are God’s very dear and beloved children. It also tells how excited and amazed we should be about our status as God’s beloved children who are not recognized by the world. The world, that does not recognize Jesus, does not recognize God’s children either.

Rejoice! Be happy! You are God’s very dear and beloved children! And be grateful and be faithful to this calling!

John 10:11-18

This Gospel passage proclaims Jesus as the good and caring shepherd who knows us, loves us, leads us, and lays down his life for us. The image of the shepherd appealed to the listeners of Jesus and to the early Christians. Sheep and Shepherd shared intimate and lifelong relationship. This was a good and readily understood image which described the bond between Jesus and his followers.

The image of the shepherd is very challenging and demanding to the contemporary ministers since it reflects a very caring, provident, protective, selfless, self-sacrificing, and enduring relationship. The good shepherd knows and is known by the sheep...the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.....because the good shepherd loves, cherishes and values the sheep.

Our good shepherd, Jesus, in laying down his life for us, secured our safety and our salvation. This is a very challenging and demanding call for all ministers of today. Be grateful! You have a good shepherd in Jesus!

Look to this good shepherd for direction and follow his direction!

I am the good shepherd.....(who) lays down his life for the sheep, says Jesus.

What an amazing relationship between human beings and their maker!!!

How awesome it is that we have become cherished and prized objects of divine diligence and sacrifice!!!

God, in Christ, is deeply concerned about me, as an individual person and not just one in a crowd – this should give me a sense of dignity and worth, pride and devotion, gratitude and praise, meaning and purpose.....

The Psalmist proclaimed, “The Lord is my shepherd”. Now we can proclaim it even more boldly because the Lord has said, “I am the good shepherd” who is ready to lay down his life for us.

The good shepherd spares no pains for the welfare of the sheep. We can look to our good shepherd with absolute confidence and devotion.

Be a caring person! Today, make an extra effort to show someone that you really care about her/him!

Be Still for a few moments!

Pray for your needs and those of your family and community.

Spiritual Communion

Lord Jesus, I believe in your real presence in the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Altar. I place myself in your presence and adore you, worship you and glorify you. I am unable to receive you in Holy Communion at Mass today. I hunger and thirst for your way, your truth and your life. Come into my heart Lord and satisfy my hunger and quench my thirst. Bless me that I may give witness to your presence in my life. Amen

Be Still for a few moments!

Saint of the Day, April 21 - St. Anselm of Canterbury and 11 other saints are remembered this day.

Anselm was born in or around Aosta in Upper Burgundy, now part of Italy, sometime around 1033. At the age of fifteen, Anselm wanted to enter a monastery, but was refused acceptance because of his father’s opposition. Twelve years later, after careless disinterest in religion and years of worldly living, he finally fulfilled his desire to be a monk. He entered the monastery of

Bec in Normandy, was elected prior three years later, and 15 years later, was unanimously chosen abbot.

Considered an original and independent thinker, Anselm was admired for his patience, gentleness, and teaching skill. Under his leadership, the Abbey of Bec became a monastic school, influential in philosophical and theological studies. During these years, at the community's request, Anselm began publishing his theological works, comparable to those of Saint Augustine. His best-known work is the book *Cur Deus Homo* ("Why God Became Man").

Against his will, Anselm was appointed archbishop of Canterbury in 1093, at the age of 60. His appointment was opposed at first by England's King William Rufus and later accepted. Rufus persistently refused to cooperate with efforts to reform the Church. Anselm finally went into voluntary exile until Rufus died in 1100. He was then recalled to England by Rufus' brother and successor, Henry I. Disagreeing fearlessly with Henry over the king's insistence on investing England's bishops, Anselm spent another three years in exile in Rome. His care and concern extended to the very poorest people. Opposing the slave trade, Anselm obtained from the national council at Westminster the passage of a resolution prohibiting the sale of human beings.

Indifferent toward religion as a young man, Anselm became one of the Church's greatest theologians and leaders. He received the title "Father of Scholasticism" for his attempt to analyze and illumine the truths of faith through the aid of reason.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

**The closer we are to the
shepherd,
the safer we are from the
wolves.**



