

# **CELEBRATE EASTER**

## **Fourth Sunday of Easter**

**Dear Lord, grant us the gift of serenity that we may seek to bring peace and comfort to those under heavy burdens and pressures of life.**

### **Acts 2:14, 36-41**

Peter reminded the Jews that Jesus, whom they crucified, is Messiah and Lord. This excerpt tells us that when they realized this, they asked Peter and the other apostles what they must do. Peter called them to conversion, a change of heart, to Baptism, to forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Many responded to his call.

**Easter reminds us of our own Baptism...we are immersed into the mystery of God's life and love...now we must live and move in this mystery!**

### **Psalm 23**

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 and their concerns. 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. Like a shepherd....God provides food, drink, safety, light in darkness, Grace, comfort and strength in "dark valley moments". This Psalm proclaims the enduring, steadfast, loyal, unconquerable love of God, the good shepherd, who will never let us slip out of his hands!

**The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
In verdant pastures, he gives me repose,  
Beside restful waters, he leads me,  
He refreshes my soul.**

### **1 Peter 2:20-25**

In this excerpt, Peter recalls the image of the suffering servant of God from Isaiah 53, which came to life in Jesus. He was without sin, yet he was insulted, and he suffered.

But he accepted the insults and the suffering for the sins of mankind. Peter says, Jesus gave us the “pattern” which we must follow. If we must suffer insult and injury, we have only to go through what he has already gone through.

**So, suffer patiently whatever comes your way.**

Peter recalls again one of the oldest images of God as “shepherd” of the souls of men. 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 ceaseless 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. Peter also uses the image of God as “guardian” of our souls. The word “guardian”, “Episkopos” in Greek, was a noble word meaning, protector, guide, director, overseer, administrator and guardian. God is presented as the shepherd and guardian of our souls.

**In his love, he cares for us; in his power he protects us; in his wisdom he guides us in the right way.**

### **John 10:1-10**

We have the beautiful and inspiring image of the shepherd, who has an intimate and very personal knowledge of the sheep, calling the sheep by name and the sheep recognizing his voice, leading the sheep and keeping them safe. This image of the shepherd reveals the unfailing vigilance and self-sacrificing love of God for us in Jesus. Jesus is presented as this shepherd, a caring, listening, sensitive and self-sacrificing leader.

This excerpt tells us that the listeners of Jesus did not understand this parable. So he told them another parable that speaks of himself as the door or gate of the sheepfold. The hillside sheepfolds in Palestine were open spaces enclosed by a wall with only an opening and no door. The Shepherd would lie down across the opening and no sheep could get in or out except over his body – the shepherd became the door. This is the image that Jesus used when he said, “I am the gate”. It is through Jesus that we find access to God. In and through Jesus we have a new sense of security and safety. In and through Jesus we have life in abundance. He says, he came so that we may “have life and have it more abundantly”.

**Look to Jesus as your good shepherd, leader and friend! And like the good shepherd, be a caring, sensitive and self-sacrificing leader! Learn to make these qualities yours in your ministry as a parent or educator or pastor or political or social leader.**

**Saint of the Day, April 26 - St. Pedro de San José de Betancur and 11 others are remembered this day.**

Betancourt was born at Vilaflor on the Island of Tenerife in 1626. As a small child, he worked as a shepherd, caring for his family's small flock, their only source of income, but also spending some time praying in a small cave in the arid region near the present-day town of El Médano. When the father's estate was seized by a moneylender in 1638 for failure to pay the family's debt, Peter was bound to his service in return for the monies still due him. During this period, his eldest brother, Mateo, migrated to Spain's colonies in the New World, possibly settling in Ecuador.

In 1649, at age 23, Betancourt was freed from his period of servitude and decided to follow his brother's example. He set sail for Guatemala, the capital of New Spain, in hopes of connecting with a relative engaged in government service there. By the time he had reached Havana, Cuba, he was out of money. He then spent a year serving a priest there who was also from Tenerife. He had to pay for his passage from that point by working on a ship which docked at Honduras from where he walked to Antigua Guatemala. When he arrived in La Antigua Guatemala, he was so destitute that he joined the bread line which the Franciscan friars had established to feed the poor. Eventually he found his uncle who then found him a job in a local textile factory.

In 1653 Betancourt enrolled in the Jesuit College of San Borgia to study for priesthood. When after three years he could not master the material, he withdrew from the school and abandoned this idea. After holding the position of sacristan for a while in a church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, he rented a house in a suburb of the city called Calvary, and there taught reading and catechism to poor children.

Unable to receive holy orders, Betancourt became a Franciscan tertiary at the Franciscan friary of Costa Rica in Antigua Guatemala and adopted the religious name of Peter of Saint Joseph. He visited hospitals, jails, the unemployed and worked with the young. In 1658 Peter was given a hut which he converted into a hospital for the poor who had been discharged from the city hospital but still needed to convalesce. His zeal elicited benefactions from those around him and the bishop and governor supplied him with all the conveniences he required.

Three years later several individuals provided for the purchase of the houses surrounding the one Peter then occupied and on their site was erected a hospital in which he could better work. He himself worked with the masons. The hospital was thoroughly equipped and stocked. The institution, a hospital for the convalescent poor, was placed under the patronage of Our Lady of Bethlehem. Soon after there was a shelter for the homeless, a school for the poor, an oratory, and an inn for priests.

Not wanting to neglect the rich of Guatemala City, Pedro began walking through their part of town ringing a bell and inviting them to repent. Other men came to share in Pedro's work. Out of this group came the Bethlehemite Congregation, which won papal

approval after Pedro's death. A Bethlehemite sisters' community, similarly, founded after Pedro's death, was inspired by his life of prayer and compassion.

He is sometimes credited with originating the Christmas Eve posadas procession in which people representing Mary and Joseph seek a night's lodging from their neighbors. The custom soon spread to Mexico and other Central American countries. Pedro died in 1667 and was canonized by Pope John Paul II in Guatemala City on July 30, 2002.

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