

Dominica IV Paschae A
Dominica Boni Pastoris

Lectio Divina by Fr. Randy Soto

I. Lectio

A. *"The larger part of Judea was a plateau with inhospitable and rocky soil, more adapted to livestock than to agriculture. Grass was scarce and the flock had to continually travel from one spot to another; there were no walls for protection and because of this the shepherd always had to be with the flock. A traveler of the last century has left us a portrait of the shepherd of Palestine: 'When you see him in a high pasture, sleepless, a gaze that searches in the distance, weather-beaten, leaning on his staff, ever attentive to the movements of the flock, you understand why the shepherd acquired such importance in the history of Israel that they gave this title to their kings and Christ assumed it as an emblem of self-sacrifice'" (Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa).*

B. In the First reading we are given part of that wonderful discourse of the Shepherd Peter on the day of Pentecost. With unction and great articulation Peter expounds the kerygma (essential message) of the Gospel: that Christ being God, became man, and suffered and died, nailed to a cross for our redemption: *"God has made Him [Jesus] both Lord and Christ."* He also has been raised by the Father and is seated at the right Hand of God. In his name our sins are forgiven and we receive the Holy Spirit. Finally, through the gift of his grace we are converted and are baptized.

C. Ps 23 is the obligated song for this IV Sunday of Easter. The OT uses all sorts of analogies to describe the experience of the *Emmanuel* in the midst of Israel: cloud, column of fire, portion, cup, inheritance, rock, shield, strength, etc. But perhaps the most graphic analogy of all is that of the *Shepherd*. Ps 23 begins with a *sententia apodictica*: *"The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want:"* this sentence a strong declaration which reveals Israel's conscience of God's nature. Notice that for the OT the nature of God is not described ontologically *in se*, but economically *in nobis*.

E. In the Second Reading, Our Shepherd Peter reminds his audience that Jesus is indeed the Suffering Servant prophesized by Isaiah (Is 53:4-8). He goes on to exhort all of us to keep in mind that before we were like lost sheep, but now, once baptized, we *"have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls."*

F. We read in this Cycle A the first part of the Good Shepherd Discourse of John's Gospel. Using OT apodictic language, Jesus declares: *"I am the Gate of the sheep-fold,"* which is meant to prepare the even stronger affirmation: *"I am the Good Shepherd."* What to think? What is the Catechesis for this Sunday's Liturgy? All of the sudden we realize that the *God-Shepherd* of Ps 23 and the *Suffering Servant* of Is 53 are the same person, our Lord Jesus Christ. His mission is none other than *"to give us life and life abundantly."* We cannot but to preach explicitly about the mission of the Good Shepherd in the midst of

his flock. This is why the Popes have recommended for 45 years now that we celebrate during this Sunday the WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS.

III. *Meditatio*

A. *"In the Old Testament, God himself is represented as the shepherd of his people. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" (Psalm (23:1). "He is our God and we are his people whom he shepherds" (Psalm 95:7). The future Messiah is also described with the image of the shepherd: "Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care" (Isaiah 40:11). This ideal image of the shepherd finds its complete realization in Christ. He is the good shepherd who goes in search of the lost sheep; he feels compassion for the people because he sees them "as sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36); he calls his disciples "the little flock" (Luke 12:32). Peter calls Jesus "the shepherd of our souls" (1 Peter 2:25) and the Letter to the Hebrews (Hebrews 13:20) speaks of him as "the great shepherd of the sheep" (Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa).*

B. In order to understand the role of a shepherd we must know the nature of the sheep.

Sheep usually live to be about eight years old. They hate to be alone--that's why they live in flocks (groups of sheep). Sheep are very gentle animals and are easily frightened. They flock together for protection because they can't really protect themselves. The sheep has many natural predators, animals that hunt and kill sheep for food. They include coyotes, wolves and domestic dogs. Sometimes larger animals, like mules or llamas, are kept in the pastures with the sheep to scare off possible predators.

The people that raise and care for sheep are called shepherds. Sometimes, shepherds have dogs to help take care of the sheep. The dog learns to round up the sheep, and when one wanders from the flock, the dog brings it back! When a lamb is born, the shepherd makes sure it gets off to a good, healthy start in life. To find out more about when lambs are born, read the next story,

Sheep have been a friend to people for over 10,000 years, providing both meat and clothing. There are many different breeds of sheep. Some are raised mainly for meat, and others primarily for their wool. Sheep are valuable because they often graze land that other livestock cannot. Sheep eat grass and hay.

Sheep usually give birth once a year and have 1-3 lambs. They normally live to be about 8 years old. One year's growth of fleece is about 8 pounds of wool. Sheep are usually shorn once a year. The sheep shearer uses a machine that is like the clippers used to trim a dog's fur. Wool straight from the sheep is called raw wool. Raw wool may go through more than 70 processing steps to assure that fabrics made from the wool are of the highest quality. One of the best things about wool fabrics is that they are flame resistant, so they are safer to wear. Wool also provides excellent protection from cold and wet weather. Even if your wool sweater gets wet from snow or rain, it will still keep you warm. Wool also wears well and lasts for a long time.

Sheep are also raised to provide meat. Lambs are ready for market when they weigh somewhere between 90-120 pounds. Lamb as food is an outstanding source of vitamins and minerals, and is one of the easiest to digest. The meat from a grown sheep is called mutton and that from a young sheep is called lamb. Most of the lambs in Michigan are raised for meat.

Female sheep are called ewes, baby sheep are called lambs, and male sheep are called rams. A group of sheep is called a flock.

By far, the most prevalent animals in the Holy Land were — and still are — sheep. Well-

adapted to the arid terrain of the landscape, sheep provided a distinct way of life for humans for centuries, producing both food and wool.

Under Judaic Law, sheep were considered "clean" animals and could therefore be eaten. They were also slaughtered for religious sacrifice. Shepherds in Biblical times had the difficult task of keeping their sheep safe and unblemished because only the most perfect specimens could be offered in sacrifice.

In the Gospel of Luke, we're told that shepherds were keeping watch over their flocks one night when angels appeared, telling them of the birth of the Messiah in a Bethlehem manger. The shepherds immediately set off to see the baby.

Shepherds and sheep are mentioned hundreds of times throughout the Bible. The shepherd's job became a metaphor for a caring and loving God because shepherds protected, fed, and provided shelter and direction for their flock. The parable of the Good Shepherd in the Gospel of John says that a shepherd would also lay down his life for his flock.

Ultimately, Jesus would give his life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. His crucifixion would also help bring to an end the widespread slaughter of animals as religious sacrifices, and out of this tradition would come the comparison of Jesus to a lamb — the most common sacrificial animal.

It's possible that the shepherds who arrived at the manger would offer baby lambs as gifts. But since Luke doesn't mention the gift of lambs, it's more likely that the appearance of lambs in the Nativity is a symbol of Jesus' greater mission as the ultimate sacrificial offering.

C. What, then, does a shepherd do?

The tasks of a Near Eastern shepherd were: to watch for enemies trying to attack the sheep, to defend the sheep from attackers, to heal the wounded and sick sheep, to find and save lost or trapped sheep, to love them, sharing their lives and so earning their trust."

The pastor/shepherd was a herdsman — a keeper of a herd or flock. They are to instruct the flock in God's ways, and give care and oversight to them. We must understand the pastor is a servant of God first then the flock; not the other way around. We get an idea of the person of the pastor from how they dealt with the occupation of a shepherd.

a) The shepherd had a shepherd's rod, it's like a policeman's club, made of oak wood and has a knob on the end of it...nails were sometimes driven in the end of it to make a better weapon. This was not a weapon for the sheep but for predators.

b) The shepherd's Rod was a symbol of protection, power, and authority. It was a stick five or sometimes six feet long with a crook at the end of it.

c) One of the principle duties at all seasons of the year is for the shepherd to plan food for his flock.

d) The shepherd gathers them, feeds them, waters them, protects them, and cares for them.

e) The shepherd never drives his sheep; he always leads them, often going before them; he often walks by their side, and sometimes follows behind.

f) One man can usually handle from fifty to one hundred sheep; if more he seeks a helper; the hireling does not usually have the personal interest in the sheep that the shepherd has.

g) The pastor is also to care for the young and baby lambs, seek the lost, watch over them, and care for the sick ones.

h) Sheep cannot go for more than three or four days without water."

III. Oratio

We begin our celebration by praising the Name of the Lord with Ps 32: *"The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord; by the word of the Lord the heavens were made, alleluia"* (Introit); then we pray to experience personally the tender and courageous care of Jesus the Good Shepherd: *"give us new strength from the courage of Christ our shepherd, and lead us to join the saints in heaven"* (OP); during the offertory, we profess our faith and hope in the Good Shepherd as we say: *"May the continuing work of our Redeemer bring us eternal joy"* (PG). Christians know that Jesus the Good Shepherd is always and everywhere the Priest, the Altar and the Sacrificial Lamb: *"He is still our priest, our advocate who always pleads our cause. Christ is the victim who dies no more, the Lamb, once slain, who lives forever."* (Preface). During Communion we are reminded that: *"The Good Shepherd is risen! He who laid down his life for his sheep, who died for his flock, he is risen, alleluia."* (CA) Finally, we ask the Father exercise in us to us his Shepherd qualities: *"Father, eternal shepherd, Watch over the flock redeemed by the blood of Christ and lead us to the Promised Land"* (PC).

III. Contemplatio

Æ. [Message of his holiness Pope Benedict XVI for this IV Sunday of Easter.pdf](#)

Β. [Saint Augustine Tractate 45 on John 1,1-10.pdf](#)

C. Prayer of Pope Benedict for Vocations

*O Father, raise up among Christians
abundant and holy vocations to the priesthood,
who keep the faith alive
and guard the blessed memory of your Son Jesus
through the preaching of his word
and the administration of the Sacraments,
with which you continually renew your faithful.
Grant us holy ministers of your altar,
who are careful and fervent guardians of the Eucharist,*

*the sacrament of the supreme gift of Christ
for the redemption of the world.*

*Call ministers of your mercy,
who, through the sacrament of Reconciliation,
spread the joy of your forgiveness.*

*Grant, O Father, that the Church may welcome with joy
the numerous inspirations of the Spirit of your Son
and, docile to His teachings, may she care for vocations
to the ministerial priesthood and to the consecrated life.*

*Sustain the Bishops, priests and deacons,
consecrated men and women, and all the baptized in Christ,
so that they may faithfully fulfill their mission
at the service of the Gospel.*

This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Mary, Queen of Apostles, pray for us.