



a Kendall Hunt Company

Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year A, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session read all the readings.

Acts 2:1, 4, 36-41

Psalm 23:1-3, 3-4, 5-6

1 Peter 2:20-25

John 10:1-10

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word or image that engages you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

The Word in Liturgy

Although at this point in the liturgical calendar the Church has not yet celebrated Pentecost, the entire Easter season is marked by readings from Acts concerning events that occurred after the giving of the Spirit. This is no accident, but it demonstrates that the whole season is Spirit-filled, from the Easter Vigil to Pentecost. Today's reading is taken from Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost itself, continuing the passage read last Sunday. In response to his proclamation of the Good News (narrated last week), some of the crowd are struck by the message and ask, "What are we to do?" This question is the same as the one asked by those who heard the preaching of John the Baptist (Luke 3:10). The truth cannot be entertained passively, but demands a response in action. Peter's command—to believe and be baptized—highlights the mission of the Church, which is also illustrated by the three thousand who were baptized. Thus, the proclamation of the resurrection provokes a crisis in people's lives, demands decision, and results in rapid growth of the new community of faith.

The complex imagery of shepherd and sheep contained in the tenth chapter of John's gospel gives the fourth Sunday of Easter its customary name ("Good Shepherd Sunday") and has many reference points. The image of the shepherd is well known in the Old Testament literature as an image for God and for leadership of the community. The reference to others who are "thieves and marauders" may reflect the condemnation in Ezekiel of the "false shepherds" whose corrupt influence will be replaced by God's own shepherding. The contrast between the shepherd who is Jesus and other, hostile influences may also reflect the tension

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which developed between Christians and the leaders of the Jewish communities from which—the early Church sprang. Continuing conflicts made it necessary to look to and trust Christ alone, the true shepherd.

The text also relies on a common understanding of shepherding practices in first-century Palestine. The sheep were gathered for the night in an enclosed area which had but one opening, and no gate. The shepherd would lay across the opening during the night, to protect the sheep from any possible predators, and so was himself the gate. Several flocks would be mixed together, but the sheep would recognize the shepherd's voice and respond to none other when called. Last of all, rather than walking behind the sheep and using dogs and other animals to keep the flock together as is done today, the shepherd would walk in front of the sheep and lead them. In today's gospel passage, the description of Jesus through these metaphors may be summed up as follows: he protects his followers daily by laying down his own life for them, he gathers them into a unique relationship with himself, and he guides them by leading the way.

Catholic Doctrine



Jesus, the Good Shepherd

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The person of Jesus reveals God the Father. His words and deeds, his whole life, open to us the mystery of God (CCC 516). Similarly, the many titles of Jesus illuminate for us particular aspects of his identity: Christ, Messiah, Lord, Son of God, Son of Mary, Lamb of God, King of the Universe, and so on. The fourth Gospel, in particular, is characterized by vivid and direct statements made by Jesus ("I am . . .") describing who he is, for example, "the light of the world," "the bread of life," "the way, the truth and the life," "the living water," and "the good shepherd." These metaphors provide a rich imaginative framework for understanding the mystery of Jesus and the relationship of the believer to Christ.

The image of shepherd suggests a number of meanings, building upon Hebrew scripture (for examples, see Genesis 48:15, Psalm 23, Ezekiel 34:11). The Good Shepherd is the leader who lays down his life for the sheep, his flock. He is the caring companion, who protects them, whose voice they recognize and who provides pasture and life for them. The believer is thus offered a relationship of trust and safety because of the action of the shepherd. The use of this image indicates the intimate and close bond between the members of the flock, the Church, with Jesus, the shepherd (see John 10:15).