

4th Sunday of Easter

Br. Samuel Springuel

12 May, 2019

1st Reading Acts 13:14,43–52

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 100:1–2,3,5

2nd Reading Revelation 7:9,14B–17

Gospel John 10:27–30

This Sunday, the Fourth Sunday of Easter, is often referred to as Good Shepherd Sunday because the Gospel for it every year is taken from the 10th chapter of John where Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd. In Year A, we hear the start of the chapter, where Jesus describes the difference the shepherd and thieves. The shepherd is interested in the welfare of the flock. The thieves solely in their own gain. In Year B, we hear the middle of chapter, where Jesus contrasts the shepherd with the hired hand. The shepherd stands between the flock and danger, protecting it even at the cost of his own life. The hired hand runs from danger, leaving the flock to fend for itself in order to save his own life. Unfortunately, this is Year C. We heard the end of the chapter, at which point the shepherd imagery is basically over. All we get is “My sheep hear my voice; I know them and they follow me.”

That little bit of shepherd imagery with which the gospel opened, however, packs quite a punch. Think about it, we would expect Jesus to say, “My sheep hear my voice; *they* know *it* and they follow me.” The sheep are trained to respond to the master’s voice, making them easier to direct and keep together as they move about. The master’s voice is like a homing beacon, calling the sheep to food, shelter, safety. Indeed, this very imagery appears in the gospel for year A: “the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice.”

This is not, however, what Jesus says here. The words we heard Jesus speak today are “*I know them.*” Jesus knows his sheep, he knows us. This is quite possibly the most important line in the entire Good Shepherd chapter.

Jesus knows me, he knows you. He knows our weaknesses. That extra helping of dessert, that fight we had the other day, that willful blindness we develop walking down the street past the poor and homeless who need our help. Whatever we’ve done wrong, whatever good we’ve failed to do, Jesus knows all our imperfections. And yet he cares for us anyway. The good shepherd takes care of the sheep: no matter how dirty and smelly they might be, he will get right next to them to help them out of difficulty and tend their wounds. No matter how many times they wander away from the flock, he is ready to go out, find them, and bring them home. No matter how often they are threatened by the wolves of the world, he will stand between them and the wolves, laying down his life if necessary to keep the wolves at bay. Jesus knows us, knows the dangers we face and create and is still there for us anyway.

There is something incredibly comforting about that. Jesus knows us. We don't have to pretend to be anyone other than ourselves with him. Jesus knows us. There is nothing we have done which we need to hide. Jesus knows us. We don't have to be afraid of being misunderstood. Jesus knows us.

But this is also incredibly challenging. Jesus knows us. We can't put our best face forward and fool him into thinking we're this great person. Jesus knows us. Things we would rather forget ourselves are plainly visible to him. Jesus knows us. We can't pass off our insensitivity and meanness as jokes or ignorance. Jesus knows us.

Being known is a contradictory experience. We are not expected to be perfect, but are expected to improve. We don't run the risk of disappointing Jesus, but he will mourn over our failings. Each of our triumphs is acknowledged and celebrated, but their flaws and limitations are clearly seen too. In being known we are both accepted for who we are and challenged to be better.

Jesus knows us. Now, will we follow him?