

Fourth Sunday of Easter



Fear is a crippling feature that is often at the core of our dark journey through active addiction. It has the tendency to freeze us and keep us in isolation. We have turned to our compulsive behavior as a remedy for fear, yet when we take a moment to get honest with ourselves, we recognize that our addictive behavior and unhealthy attachments only fueled its ravenous flame.

In order to break free from the darkness of fear, we need a Higher Power who knows our anguish and is willing to go after the stray sheep among his flock. "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick," Jesus proclaimed to those who think they had it all figured out (Luke 5:31).

We can learn much about our Higher Power, Jesus Christ, as revealed through this Sunday's Gospel Reading:

Jesus said:

"Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber. But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.

The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice, as the shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice.

But they will not follow a stranger; they will run away from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers."

As it turns out, we are not much different than sheep when it comes to our social behaviors. Sheep are an animal that rely heavily on their flock for safety, bonding, and purpose. When isolated, they undergo severe stress and demand extra attention until they are properly re-integrated into community. The image of the Good Shepherd placing the lost sheep on His shoulders mirrors the grace our Lord offers us as we find ourselves settling into a fellowship we can call our own.

Fear is “an evil and corroding thread” which “touches about every aspect of our lives” (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 67). We had to be lifted by the Good Shepherd in order to overcome fear’s paralyzing properties. He recognizes our voice as we cry out for help and we begin to recognize His. Once we are active in a fellowship of believers, we are told to *stay in the middle of the herd*.

Jesus, our Shepherd, also heals and gives us the authority to heal each other. In the same way modern recovery groups grew from one addict/alcoholic helping another, the first century Church was comprised of those who witnessed the healing power of Jesus Christ and were willing to spread it to all corners of the world. In our resurrected form, we are called to do the same while remaining obedient to the word of our Shepherd.

Let us not forget the source of our freedom and new life. We can offer gratitude for the efforts of those who established modern recovery and for the courageous faith of the first disciples of Jesus. We walk with those disciples throughout the season of Easter as they provide us hope and encouragement.

Finally, let us find peace in Psalm 23, this Sunday's Responsorial Psalm:

*He guides me in right paths
for his name's sake.*

*Even though I walk in the dark valley
I fear no evil; for you are at my side.
With your rod and your staff
that give me courage.*

Reflection Questions

- How does fear play a role in your life today?
- What spiritual tools or practices have helped you overcome fear?
- How do you recognize the voice of your Shepherd?

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Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Acts 2:14a, 36-41

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6

Second Reading: 1 Peter 2:20b-25

Gospel: John 10:1-10