

Weekly Sunday Readings Reflections

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Fourth Sunday of Easter – May 11, 2025

"My sheep hear my voice, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand"

Question of the Week: *How do you recognize the voice of God in your life?*

- **Acts of the Apostles 13:14,43-52**
 - We are turning to the Gentiles
- **Psalm 100:1-2 / 3 / 5**
 - *R. We are his people, the sheep of his flock.*
- **Revelation 7:9,14b-17**
 - The Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life.
- **John 10:27-30**
 - I give eternal life to My sheep.

Reading 1: Friends in Need

13:14 “arrived in Antioch (near) Pisidia” is actually “Antioch of Pisidia.” While the city of Antioch was near the region of Pisidia, it actually lay in the neighboring region of Phygia. An American equivalent would be “Washington, D.C., of Virginia.”

“having entered the synagogue on the day of the Sabbath, (they) sat (down)” It is unclear if Paul and Barnabas sat in the congregation or took the “Seat of Moses,” the chair at the head of the assembly where the rabbi would teach. But, it was not unusual for visitors to be given the honor of teaching in the local synagogue. In Acts 13:15, Paul was given such an invitation. At this point, he preached the Good News.

13:45, 50 “The (Jewish leaders)” is literally “the Jews.” In light of the excommunication of the Jewish Christians by the synagogues

by the time Acts was written, the author Luke may have lumped the actions of the leadership into the synagogue body itself.

“the (statements) having been spoken by Paul, insulting (him)” The Leaders spoke against the statements of Paul with insults. But, were the insults against Paul or against the Good News he preached? The Greek is unclear. The verse was translated as “insulting (him)” but it could be translated “insulting (the works and person of Jesus).” The first case was slander, the second case was blasphemy.

13:47 ““I placed you as a light to the Gentiles, (for) you to be (a means of) salvation unto the ends of the earth.”” from Isaiah 49:6, Septuagint (a first century Greek translation of the Old Testament). In Luke 2:32, Simeon applied these words to Jesus and his mission of universal salvation.

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Luke applied them to Christian missionaries, by extension.

Who is a lasting friend? The one with whom you share interests, or the one who needs what you have to offer? In this Sunday's first reading, St. Paul shows us that generosity is better than shared interests in bonding people together.

In the past chapters of Acts, the focus has shifted away from life in the Jerusalem community towards a missionary effort in the Judean countryside and beyond. Paul has joined that missionary effort; this passage records a proclamation from his first missionary journey.

Paul's first speech to the synagogue is missing from the passage. In 13:15-42, Paul recounts a short history of Israel to introduce the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The speech had such an effect that Paul was invited to address the city the next week [44].

The synagogue was split over the message. Some native Jews and converts were attracted to the Good News [43], while others opposed Paul to the point of verbal abuse [45]. Paul's message was clearly controversial and caused great scandal in the Jewish community. As a result, Paul and Barnabas were rejected, so, they announced their intention to address the non-Jews; Paul and Barnabas saw this proclamation as a means to fulfill prophecy (i.e., Isaiah 49:6) [46-47].

The reaction to Paul's announcement caused immediate retaliation, with good reason. Paul's ministry to the Gentiles 1) would mean a schism in the synagogue between those who believed in Christ and those who did not, 2) would encourage the free flow of Gentile converts into the community who would not

follow Jewish Law, 3) would create a separate and competing synagogue if the Christians and the Gentile converts were ejected from the synagogue. Indeed, that was the eventual result. Paul established separate Christian synagogues (assemblies) in the cities where he preached. In the meantime, his message created a strange opposition, a coalition of rich Jewish women and pagan city fathers who had Paul and Barnabas thrown out of the city [50].

Paul should have befriended his fellow Jews with whom he had a shared interest, but he gave a message to the non-Jews who found joy in faith [48-49,52]. That's where Paul found his true friends.

Q: What is the basis of our friendships, shared interests (what you can share with me) or sharing Good News (what I can share with you)? Is friendship found in selfishness or evangelization?

Responsorial: How to Prepare for Worship

Q: How do you prepare for worship on Sunday? How do you focus your attitude for Mass?

Sunday worship can fall into a rut. It can become just part of the ritual we have that defines one week from the next. But, should our encounter with God be a forgettable event? Shouldn't we prepare our minds and hearts for worship?

Psalm 100 was a call to worship. Actually, it was two calls to worship: 100:1-3 was a general call outside the Temple walls onto the outer courtyard, while 100:4-5 was a call to

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worship inside the Temple and a preparation for a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

100:1-3 was a call to joy. The leader would cry out to those in the Temple court, including those righteous Gentiles who came on pilgrimage to worship YHWH (these non-Jews represented “all you lands” in 100:1b). 100:1b-2 was a three-time exhortation for celebration. 100:3 explained the reason for the joy; YHWH was the creator of not only all people, he formed a unique people to be his own.

100:4-5 was a call to thanksgiving. These verses could have been the shout made at the thanksgiving sacrifice, a full immolation of a male farm animal or bird on the Temple altar. The act of worship blessed the name of YHWH (and, thus, invoked his power); the blessing reminded the worshiping audience of YHWH’s covenant with his people (expressed as “love” and “faithfulness.”)

The two parts of Psalm 100 reminds us that joy and thanksgiving are the proper attitudes for worship. We are to be happy when we present ourselves to God. We are to be thankful when we are in his presence. Other attitudes are possible (sorrow, need, intercession, surrender, peace, etc.) but joy and thanksgiving should be our primary focus.

The Lord is here. Be happy and give him thanks.

This Sunday, focus on your attitude before worship. Take the time to clear away distractions and prepare your heart to truly receive the Lord with joy.

Reading 2: Suffering and Glory

7:9 “clothed in long, white robes and palms in their hands” The color white referred to purity and victory (were the robes were a reference to baptismal clothes?). The palms were signs of celebration (see 1 Maccabees 13:51 and 2 Maccabees 10:7).

7:14 “ I said to him, ‘My lord, you know.’” In context, the word “lord” did not refer to God, but was a phrase of polite exchange, since the person addressed was one of the elders. “Sir” would be a good translation of the word.

These verses represent the gathering of all the faithful at the end times, in praise of God and the Lamb. The uncountable throng in 7:9 was the same as the infamous “144, 000” described in 7:4-8 (that is, 12,000 faithful times the 12 tribes of Israel; since the number “12” represented fulness and completion, the 144,000 represented the fullness of the faithful remnant). But, in this context, the faithful remnant of Israel not only comes from the Diaspora, the spread of God’s chosen throughout the world. No, the faithful come from every land, every people, every race, speaking every tongue. They would gather together at the end for one purpose: to give praise the Lord.

The environment was the royal throne room of heaven. John painted the ceremony as a revelation of royal glory (influenced by the court proceedings of the Roman Caesar; the shouts of praise reflected the titles for the Caesars). Yet, John the Elder alluded to the Feast of Booths, a harvest festival where pilgrims gathered in Jerusalem and camped around its Temple, so they could be close to the divine presence. The palms reinforced this later image, since the Feast included processions with palms.

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The clothing and the context of the dialogue after the shout of praise revealed a tension between the liturgical and end times elements. The elder stated two qualities of the faithful around the throne. First, they entered the throne room after they endured the sufferings of the end times (the “great tribulation”) and washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (an allusion to Baptism and Eucharist). These would be the same faithful who the Lord would shepherd and lead to “living waters” (an allusion to Baptism; see John 4:10). In other words, John the Elder saw a clear connection between the persecution of community and its liturgical worship. To join the Christian community meant suffering; suffering for the faith was a prerequisite for worship before the throne of God.

Second, the community of the faithful was protected by God at the end time. There would be no more hunger or thirst (see the connection of the end times blessing with the Eucharist in John 6:35). And they would see God’s justice. The destruction of the evil in the world (symbolized by the heat of the sun) would not touch them. The Lord himself would comfort them (God would wipe every tear away).

This scene leaves us with one overarching theme. When we worship God, we should bring our sufferings to him. Being Christian may not bring us popularity; it may bring us pain. But Christ did not promise relief from pain. In fact, he promised us a share in his pain. But a share in his pain will bring a share in his glory. This is the meaning of the Eucharist. Share in suffering. Share in glory.

Q: How do you share your pain with the Lord? In prayer? In life? How does he share his glory with you?

Gospel: What Unites Us

Q: Have you experienced a common bond with others? What was that bond? How did it bind you together?

Sometimes experience bonds people together in unexpected ways. A tragedy or a spectacle or, even, a leader can bring diverse peoples together to share a common memory or goal. The intimacy the bond brings can only be understood by those it directly affects. It seems the bond can only be communicated vicariously to an outsider through analogy.

In John's gospel, Jesus described the bond that unites his followers as the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep. The analogy of the Good Shepherd worked, but had its limits.

What unites us as Christians? Culture, habit, fellowship, or something deeper? In John's gospel, Jesus gave us the answer.

10:28 "eternal life . . . into the age" These two phrases were equivalent. Eternal life did not only refer to unending life. It referred to life with God. (Since God lives in the eternal moment, life with him is unending.)

"Into the age" referred to God's era, a time of the Kingdom. Notice the results of life with God included salvation from the tribulation of the end time (not destroyed into the age) and assurance of life with the Lord (no one will take the saved from his hand).

10:29 "My Father who has given to me all (followers) is greater (than everything)." This

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is a very difficult sentence to translate because of the word "all." What did the word refer to? There were two possibilities: 1) what the Father gave Jesus (i.e., his followers) or 2) the power of the Father (he is greater than "all," i.e., everything). The translation above tries to honor both meanings.

In the Good Shepherd discourse (10:1-42), Jesus described his purpose before a skeptical audience. He acts like a dedicated shepherd. He protects his flock against thieves and wolves even to the point of death. He befriends his followers, as a shepherd who treats each sheep like we treat our favorite family pet. He loves each and every one of us, his followers, intimately [27].

As his sheep, we follow his call [27]. Sheep are not the slow animals some claim; they can do tricks and they know the particular call of their shepherd. In many countries, shepherds will mix their herds in holding pens; when a shepherd calls, only his or her sheep will respond.

Our relationship is more than call and response, however. Jesus gives us a life that cannot be taken away [28]. With this life we are in the hands of Jesus and the hands of the Father [28-29].

The Father gave Jesus his followers as a gift [29]; Jesus gives us, his followers, eternal life as a gift. Both are the presence of the Spirit. The Spirit of the Father flows through the Son to us; this outpouring unites us to Christ and to the Father.

Our relationship with Jesus begins with his call and our response. The dialogue between Christ and us deepens the relationship. Through the relationship, the Father becomes accessible, even intimate. In this relationship

we find a life that can never die; this life is intrinsic to the dialogue. The entire package (dialogue, relationship, life in the relationship, and intimacy with the Father) is the result of the Spirit. As the Spirit unites the believer to Christ, so to it unites Christians to one another.

Catechism Theme: Four Marks of the Church (CCC 866-869)

In the gospel, Jesus stressed the unity he has with his Father and with his followers. This unity manifests itself in the four marks of the Church, those qualities that define the Church. The four marks are: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

How is the Church "one?" The Church is one because it has one Lord, it has only one faith, it is formed in one Baptism, it comes together as one Body, it is given life by one and the same Spirit, and it shares one hope for the future. (866)

How is the Church "holy?" The Church is holy because God the Father called people together to form the Church, God the Son gave his life up for the Church and is one with the Church in the sacraments, and God the Holy Spirit gives the Church life. The Church is a home for sinners who wish to come closer to God. (867)

How is the Church "catholic?" The word "catholic" means "for everyone at all times." The Church is catholic because it serves everyone and at all times. The Church has the complete faith. And the Church is the true way to heaven. (868)

How is the Church "apostolic?" The faith and power come from Christ, the Pope in union with the bishops and the Church has the

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power to teach faith and morals infallibly (i.e., without error). (869)

*Q: Have you ever reflected on the bond that unites you with other Christians?
Which of the four marks are involved in that bond?*

God is the cause of our community. He sent his Son into the world to call us, to embrace us, to unite us. He makes us one with his Son.

He sanctifies us with his Spirit. He gifts us with a full faith and the power to reach out to others, no matter who they are. He sends us out the same way he sent out the apostles, to spend the Good News to others.

Q: As we reach out to the Father, do we reach out to others, to become one with them? How can we share our unity with them?