



Bringing Home the Word

Fourth Sunday of Easter | April 22, 2018

Our Good Shepherd

By Mary Katharine Deeley

My mother lived for a time on a ranch in Texas. The ranch had cattle and sheep. My mother told me that sheep are pretty dumb and need a lot of care. She had great respect for the ranch hands who patiently got them out to pasture and then rounded them up when it was time to come in. Left to their own devices, she said, sheep would be easy prey for coyotes, foxes, and bobcats that roam the hill country.

Sheep were important for many families living in first-century Palestine as well. They provided food, clothing, milk, and a source of income.

A good shepherd was worth his weight in gold, because he spent his days with the sheep, leading them to pasture, protecting them from harm, and finding them when they got lost.

Shepherds may not have had a high social status, but it would have been hard to live without them.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, does all these things for his flock, and then goes even further: "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

The ranch hands my mother talked about would have grieved over a dead sheep but wouldn't have died trying to save it. They made sure the sheep were watered and fed, but they didn't make the sheep's lives more abundant.

But we have abundant life because Jesus laid down his life for us. He is our Good Shepherd. Can we ask anything more?

Is the Lord with you today? +

Sunday Readings

Acts 4:8-12

[Peter said,] "He is the stone rejected by you ... which has become the cornerstone."

1 Jn 3:1-2

Beloved, we are God's children now;

Jn 10:11-18

[Jesus said,] "I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

A Word From Pope Francis

The grave environmental crisis facing our world demands an ever greater sensitivity to the relationship between human beings and nature. We have a responsibility to pass on the beauty of nature in its integrity to future generations, and an obligation to exercise a just stewardship of the gifts we have received.

—Visit to Kenya, November 25, 2015



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Jesus, how well do I imitate your love by sacrificing for others?
- Do I seek salvation, peace, and healing from Jesus?



Treasuring Sabbath Time

By Kathy Coffey

Third Commandment: "Remember the sabbath day—keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8).

We've all gotten a Great Idea in the shower, on the bus, at the gym, or staring into space. We might suddenly remember where we left the keys, decide what's for dinner, or solve a problem that's been annoying us. The mind relishes empty spaces, becoming more creative in decluttered stretches.

If that is true in daily life, the Third Commandment shows how rest is even more important for our spiritual lives. The root meaning of the word *sabbath* is "to separate." It marks the end of one week and the start of another, or the close of work and the beginning of play.

As soon as a good directive like this is given, people exaggerate it. Some folks really ran amok with this one, even to the extreme of forbidding doing good on the Sabbath. Religious authorities spun into a frenzy when Jesus healed on the Sabbath. Clear-sighted as always, he reminded us: "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27). In other words, if it helps you live a more fulfilled life, do it. If you're going through contortions to keep a law and losing compassion in the process, forget it.

How delightful when the commandments, carved solemnly on stone and written in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, usually a grave document, both tell us to relax, lighten up.

Ready, Set, Go

For many of us, Sunday has become the "junk drawer" of the week: We cram in all the errands and duties that can't get done because of work pressures every other day. Retailers are happy to accommodate, and Sunday becomes Shopping Day.

What's wrong with this? It's not the greatest moral evil, but we could do better. In this pattern, we lose sight of what we were made to be: God's delight. We forget that we have abundant blessings and should take time to savor them, awash in gratitude.

The original meaning of the Sabbath was the day set aside for Israel to honor its covenant with God. Today, one way to observe it is with Sunday Mass. Sabbath time also reminds us that God is eager to have our attention and quick to pour out graces. When we clear our calendars and minds, we remember who we are, just as if we are making a retreat.

And if we don't? If we keep cranking out work and churning out errands, we look like responsible, tax-paying citizens. But by giving up quiet Sabbath time, we dehumanize ourselves and lose sight of what's most important. We were all made for loving God and each other. Other accomplishments are fine, but don't measure up to that.

Clearing Space for God

Some people may protest: "But I'm working three jobs to feed my family! Where am I supposed to fit in Sabbath?" For those who are this tightly scheduled, maybe it becomes an hour before the kids wake up or after they go to bed. Maybe it's time in the evening without television or computer. There are as many ways to keep holy the Sabbath as there are people. In such times we remember we are God's beloved, and no matter what life throws at us, nothing else is as fundamentally important.

Modeling a sense of Sabbath is especially important for parents. What do we want our children to remember? Mornings when the family snuggled in pajamas, built blanket caves, held tickling contests, and cooked something delicious? Or the fact that Mom and Dad dourly trooped off to work like robots? +



Risen Lord, you are the Good Shepherd who watches over us and protects us from all harm. Give me the courage to be a loving shepherd and advocate for the poor and vulnerable.

From Hopeful Meditations for Every Day of Easter Through Pentecost,

Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

April 23–28, 2018

Monday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 11:1–18 / Jn 10:1–10

Tuesday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 11:19–26 / Jn 10:22–30

Wednesday, St. Mark, Evangelist:
1 Pt 5:5b–14 / Mk 16:15–20

Thursday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 13:13–25 / Jn 13:16–20

Friday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 13:26–33 / Jn 14:1–6

Saturday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 13:44–52 / Jn 14:7–14