



## Fourth Sunday of Easter May 7, 2017 A

### GOOD SHEPHERD SUNDAY

- ◆ Healed by His Wounds
- ◆ Standing Up for the Truth
- ◆ Living Life to the Full

Traditionally, the Fourth Sunday of Easter is called Good Shepherd Sunday because the Gospel is always from John 10, in which Jesus refers to himself as a good shepherd. The following are three reflections on the readings. The first two reflections are on the Second Reading from Peter's First Letter.

#### Healed by his wounds

Reflecting on the above words from today's Second Reading, Fr. Flor McCarthy writes:

*Referring to the wounds of Christ, Peter said, "Through his wounds you have been healed." But we may ask: How could the wounds of another heal our wounds? The following true story shows how it can happen.*

*Anne's husband died of a heart attack. He was only in his mid-forties. In the weeks and months after the funeral, Anne was consumed by grief. Friends advised her to go on a weekend for the bereaved. Somewhat reluctantly she agreed to go.*

*She was surprised to find that most of the people on the weekend were not widows but separated people. At a certain stage the participants were divided into groups, and it was Anne's bad luck to find herself the only widow in her group.*

*She felt she didn't belong in the group. The other members had their husbands. It was their own fault that they had broken up. They could get back together if they really wanted to. But she had lost her husband. He was dead and gone—a good man who didn't smoke or drink, but stayed at home with the family. She felt she had nothing in common with these people. She refused to share with the group. When invited to do so she said, "I won't be staying."*

*Even though she didn't talk she did listen. As she listened, she began to realize that the other people had suffered a great deal. Some of them had put up with a terrible amount of abuse. What especially moved her was the suffering of the children. Gradually her eyes were opened. She had no idea what went on in some*

*homes. She thought that all marriages were like hers. She realized that she had had it very good.*

*Whereas earlier she had felt no sympathy for the others, now she began to feel very close to them, so much so that when she was given the chance to join another group, she said she wanted to stay where she was. Eventually she began to talk about herself. One woman said to her, "What I wouldn't give for just one of your days." The weekend proved to be a turning point for Anne. Her wounds began to heal.*

*Suffering softens our hardened hearts and enables us to enter a world of suffering where all people live at some time. In reaching out to others, we move out of our isolation into a world of shared suffering. In the simple act of showing sympathy for others there is healing.*

*Compassion is not learned without suffering. Unless you have suffered and wept you really don't understand what compassion is, nor can you comfort someone who is suffering. Unless you have cried you can't dry the tears of another. Unless you have walked in darkness you can't help wanderers to find their way. But if you have suffered you can become a pathfinder for others.*

*The wounds of others can help us to cope with and recover from our own wounds. It is by reaching out to others from our own wounds that we ourselves are healed. Shared pain is a bit like shared bread; it brings its participants closer to each other. Intimacy is the fruit that grows from touching each other's wounds.*

*If we can draw encouragement from the wounds of others, how much more so from the wounds of Christ, the Good Shepherd. His wounds help us to recognize our own. The sacred, the precious wounds of Jesus, are a source of consolation, courage and hope to us. Truly, by his wounds we are healed.*

#### Standing up for the truth

In the second reading, Peter says to us: "If you are patient when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God." Reflecting on these words, Fr. Eugene Lauer writes:

*In this complex twentieth-first century I suggest that one of the most excruciating forms of suffering is to stand up for the truth, to endanger the security and comfort of one's own life for the sake of a crucial principle—and then have no one pay any attention. To challenge some basic deceit or corruption in our system,*

to suffer the pain of confrontation and misunderstanding in the process, and then to discover that the rest of the world is “too busy” to pay attention—what a cross!

In his novel *The Vicar of Christ*, Michael Murphy puts these words on the lips of a brilliant judge who is evaluating the hero of the novel, Declan Walsh: “(He had) the stubborn courage to hold on to values when reality offered little hope of success.”

What a great tribute. What a painful process. To retain one’s values when all the “real world” around one tends to say, “That will never work,” and goes on its merry way paying no attention to the courageous challenge.

Athanasius, the great bishop of Alexandria in the fourth century, was considered foolish by his peers and by multitudes of the faithful in his diocese. He tenaciously affirmed the divinity of Christ when the majority of those around him swung to the teachings of Arianism (that Jesus is only semi-divine). Athanasius replied to his antagonists: “If the world goes against truth, then Athanasius goes against the world.” Athanasius suffered greatly. He was ignored, ridiculed, then exiled. But he never stopped confessing that Jesus is God.

In this changing, complex, confusing twentieth-first century, it can be painful, almost torturous, to adhere to the teachings of Jesus, his eternal principles, and then be ignored. We cannot explain why it is valuable to suffer in this way. With Peter, we can only say that we believe it: “If you put up with suffering for doing what is right, this is acceptable in God’s eyes.”

### Living the abundant life

This Sunday’s Gospel ends with these words:

“I came so that they may have life  
and have it more abundantly.”

Reflecting on these words, Fr. Flor McCarthy writes:

*Is Jesus talking only about eternal life or also about this life? I have no doubt but that these words are to be applied to our life on earth as much as to our hope of eternal life.*

*There is a lovely Spanish legend that goes like this. When people arrived at the gate of heaven seeking to enter, St. Peter asks them a strange questions. He says to each one, “Tell me this. Have you taken advantage of all the earthly joys which God in his goodness made available to you while you were on earth?”*

*If a person replies, “No, I haven’t,” Peter shakes his head sadly and says, “Alas, my friend, I can’t let you in—not yet at any rate. How can you expect to be ready for the heavenly joys if you have not prepared yourself*

*for them through the medium of earthly ones? I shall be obliged to send you back down to earth until you learn better.”*

*In the past the Christian religion tended to be identified with restrictions and prohibitions. Many of us were brought up on a theology of detachment from the world. This present life was viewed as nothing more than a time of trial. This kind of spirituality discouraged enjoyment of life. It led to half-heartedness. It was as if we were always keeping something back. Always living cautiously, fearfully, miserly.*

*It ought to be possible to enjoy life to the fullest while being devout and religious at the same time. However, to live fully is not the same as to live it up.*

*Life is a fragile gift. Every moment is utterly unique. This should concentrate our attention on what we are experiencing now. But every moment is also fleeting. How quickly life’s stream runs down to the sea. This fleetingness gives life its poignancy and makes it all the more precious. “For we do not enjoy this world everlastingly, only briefly; our life is like the warming of oneself in the sun” (Aztec Indians).*

*The Lord, the Good Shepherd, wants us to have life. Therefore, let us not be so timid and fearful. Let us live whatever presents itself to us because everything is a gift from God. Life is generous to those who seize it with both hands.*

*Mere existence is not enough for us. “What people are looking for is not meaning in life, but the experience of being alive—the rapture of living” (Joseph Campbell). We are meant to live. It is a well-known fact that those who have lived fully and intensely do not feel cheated at death. “Fear not that your life will end; rather fear that it may never have begun” (Thoreau). The poet, Patrick Kavanagh, said:*

Autumn I’d welcome  
had I known love in Summer days.  
I would not weep for flowers that die  
if once they’d bloom for praise.  
I would not cry for any tree,  
leaf lost, a word of misery.  
I would not make lament  
although my harvest were a beggar’s woe.

*Jesus began his ministry with these words: “Believe in the Good News.” What is the Good News? The Good News is: “I came that you may have life and have it to the full.”*

Have a great week,

*Le Saran*