



Contributed by Father Tim Uniac, C.R.

Father Tim was ordained in 1986. Over the years Father Tim has served in parish ministry as both Assistant Pastor and Pastor. For a number of years, he worked full time in youth ministry. He has served his Religious Community as Vocation Director and as Vicar Provincial. He also served his Community internationally as the Vicar General, residing in Rome for six years. Currently he serves as the Provincial Superior of the Ontario-Kentucky Province of the Congregation of the Resurrection.

4th SUNDAY OF EASTER

April 25, 2021

GATHERING TIME

(10-15 Minutes)

Introduction to the Word:

The Easter Season is a joyful time for me, and not simply because I am a member of the Congregation of the Resurrection. It is the celebrations of the Sundays of Easter that ignite the feelings of joy within me the most. Even in the midst of COVID, when much of what we do liturgically is curtailed, that is not enough to diminish the memories I hold in my heart regarding the Sundays of Easter. For instance, the return of the Gloria is an uplifting moment for me. While I am not the greatest of singers, it is not the actual singing that brings me joy, but rather it is that the people are singing the Gloria without song books, proclaiming what they believe directly from their hearts. I find the readings from the Acts of the Apostles throughout the Easter Season both joyful and informative. This book is our family history from the time of the first Christians, a history that is deeply ingrained in our church to this very day; we are who we are today because of our religious family members from the past. The insertion of that one single word back into our ritual during the Easter Season evokes so many feelings and images – ALLELUIA! This is almost a sacred word, for, from my experience, you do not hear it all that often outside of religious ritual. The word fills me with joy, so much so that I do not believe I can say the word without smiling. The renewal of baptismal promises during the Easter Season, the sprinkling of the baptismal waters upon the people of faith, the double Alleluia dismissal at the end of the Mass, the singing of familiar Easter hymns reminding me of my childhood, the flowers that adorn the sanctuary, the burning of the Paschal candle, and more. All of these things are moments of joy in my life of faith, reminding me that the Risen Lord is ever present, ever shining his light upon me, constantly calling me to be a person of the Resurrection, inviting me to sing my Alleluia to the world.

Warm-up Activity (about 8-10 minutes):

From the flowing waters of the Easter Triduum to the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, we sing our Alleluia to God for the gift of the Resurrection. Throughout these fifty days the Easter Paschal candle burns brightly in our churches, a symbol of the risen body of Christ and the fire of the Holy Spirit. During the remainder of the liturgical year the Paschal candle, placed near the baptismal font, is lit at each baptism, so that the newly baptized may receive the light of Christ. The Paschal candle is lit at each funeral, so the light of Christ may shine upon our beloved dead. As you reflect upon the Paschal candle, this concrete and powerful reminder that Christ constantly shines His light upon us, ponder all the other varied ways in which you have experienced the light of Christ shining upon you, and how the light of Christ has brought light to your moments of darkness.

The Table of the Word

THEME: Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

I have indeed been graced and blessed during my years of parish ministry to be part of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. The Catechesis is a ministry of religious formation for children inspired by the Montessori educational approach. It is not a program. The children participate in a biblical and liturgical exploration into our faith. They participate in guided meditations, small group and individual activities, all specifically designed for children. What is most impressive is that the Catechesis does not take place in a classroom-style setup, but rather in an 'atrium', a sacred and contemplative space, where, yes, silence, quiet and calm are the norm. The atrium is comprised of 'child size' fixtures and items – imagine if you will, a child size altar with sacred fixtures that permit the children to touch and feel the liturgical items, learn how they are used ritually, and to set them up for Mass. Everything in the atrium is designed to be touched and handled by the children, all in an attempt to form them in our faith. On those days I struggle with private prayer, unable to slow down and be quiet with the Lord, I picture the children in the Catechesis as they meditate – so serious, so quiet, so calm, so delighted to be in the presence of our Lord. The children remind me how to pray.

Leader: In Christ, the Good Shepherd, we have become adopted sons and daughters of God.
Trusting in God's merciful love we seek mercy and forgiveness.

For the times we have ignored the voice of the Good Shepherd, **Lord, have mercy.**

For the times we have doubted the salvation offered to us, **Christ, have mercy.**

For the times we have rejected those wishing to join the flock, **Lord, have mercy.**

Let us pray (together)
*What love you have bestowed on us, O God,
that we should be called your children,
born again in Christ by water and the Holy Spirit.
Keep us safe, make us one,
and gather all your scattered children
into the one fold of this one Shepherd.
We ask this through our Risen Lord and Saviour,
Jesus Christ. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering word, and that God is present in the word proclaimed. This is the word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the small Christian community, namely, reflecting on our life story within the context of this word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life giving.)*

FIRST READING (Acts 4:7-12)

While Peter and John were speaking to the people about the resurrection of Jesus, the captain of the temple arrested them and placed them in custody.

The next day the rulers, elders and scribes assembled. When they made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who is sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is 'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.' There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among human beings by which we must be saved."

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (1 John 3:1-2)

Beloved: See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (John 10:11-18)

Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away – and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep.

“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

“For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Lectio Divina means “sacred prayer through sacred reading.” It was a popular form of prayer in the early Church. This word proclaimed today is God's own word, God's way of speaking to you today through God's own Spirit. So, take a few moments to be quiet, allowing this word you have just heard to touch you or soak into you as you reflect quietly on the three readings. Is there a word or thought that somehow attracts you or has your interest? If so, simply identify it and describe it in a few words.

COMMENTARY:

Acts. Through the action and intercession of Peter and John, the man who was born lame has been cured. After this miracle Peter and John are arrested – it is at this point that we pick up the story in the first reading. The authorities confront the two disciples, questioning them: by what power and authority were they able to cure the lame man? Peter responds by saying that it is “by the name of Jesus Christ” that the man has been cured. As is so often the case, Peter does not stop here; he goes on to say to the authorities that *they* crucified Jesus, but God has raised Him from the dead. The boldness of Peter seems to know no bounds, for he goes even further. To the authorities (rulers, elders and scribes, those steeped in scriptural knowledge), Peter throws their knowledge of scripture back in their faces by quoting from the Prophet Isaiah: “the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, has become the cornerstone”. Where does Peter attain such boldness of faith, speaking out fully aware that the consequences to him could be dire? This passage is post Pentecost; Peter has been empowered by the Holy Spirit!

1 John. To begin this scriptural exploration, it is important to remind ourselves that this passage from 1 John is a post-resurrection account. With the resurrection understood as a reality, we can now begin to understand and make sense of some of the teachings of Jesus. This is what this passage offers us today: answers to some of our questions. For instance, why did God share such depth of love for us? 1 John says it is so that we could “be called children of God; and that is what we are.” What is the benefit of being children of God? 1 John says the benefit of being children of God is so that when Christ is revealed, “we will be like him, for we will see him as he is”. Jesus taught that it was necessary that He suffer and die; 1 John now reveals that the purpose of Jesus' suffering and dying is so that we could become children of God. Jesus taught that He would rise from the dead; 1 John now reveals that the purpose of the resurrection is so that one day we too can become like Christ as we share in the resurrection.

John. If our objective of scriptural study is to find new insight, new understanding into certain aspects of our faith, then an all-too-familiar scripture passage, such as the “Good Shepherd,” presents a particular challenge. What new insight can we gain that has not already been revealed? Clearly Jesus presents himself as the “good” shepherd in this passage, juxtaposed to the Pharisees, to whom He is speaking, whom He identifies not as good but as “hired hands”. The image of “good” that Jesus puts forth flows nicely from the understanding of the “servant of God” put forth by the Prophet Isaiah (52:13). So, what is Jesus saying? What “new” insight does this passage possibly offer? Jesus presents the “Good Shepherd”, the 'Noble Shepherd', the “Servant of God” as one who truly looks out for the well-being of the flock, to the point of laying down His very life for the flock. A new insight I gained from this is the awareness that a Shepherd is no push-over, no softie, not someone who runs away. A true Shepherd is one tough soul! A true Shepherd possesses amazing strength. Jesus is that “Good Shepherd”.

Allow 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

Acts 4:7-12 *“by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth”*

Peter proclaims that the healing miracle was possible because it was done in Jesus' name. The authorities questioned this because they were uncertain what this meant ... How were they to know that it was authentically done in the name of Jesus? We too can face this same question today: how do we know that an act done in the name of Jesus is in fact truly done in His name? What are some of the indicators we can look for in order to identify it is as done in Jesus' name?

1 John 3:1-2 *“we are God's children now”*

What does it mean to you when you are identified as a child of God? What are the “benefits” to being a child of God? What are the responsibilities that rest upon a child of God? Is being a child of God a blessing or a burden?

John 10:11-18 *“I am the good shepherd”*

Where and how do you experience the good shepherd in your life? Have you ever experienced someone, other than Jesus, who would give their very life for you? Are there times when you have been called to be a good shepherd. If so, what did that look like ... how did it feel? How do we nurture aspects of the good shepherd within each of us?

CARING-PRAYING TIME: (15-20 minutes)

1. **Word of the Week:** *“I am the good shepherd. ... I lay down my life for the sheep.”*

2. **Suggestion for the Week:**

Spend some time this week reflecting upon the attributes that a 'Shepherd' must have in order to successfully see to the well-being of the flock, the people entrusted to their care. This 'Shepherd' could be a parent, a teacher, a dear friend, a pastor, whomever.

3. **Intercessions:** (Response: **Lord, hear our prayer**)

Leader: Let us intercede for the needs of all God's children in the name of Jesus the Good Shepherd.

That all those outside the fold, for whom Jesus laid down His life, may be gathered into the one flock of the one Shepherd, we pray to the Lord ...

That those who control the destinies of nations may act as responsible stewards of the power and people entrusted to their care, we pray to the Lord ...

For all Shepherds, may the Lord continue to guide them as they place their lives at the service of their flocks, we pray to the Lord ...

On this Vocations Sunday, we pray that all people of faith may respond to God's call in their lives, we pray to the Lord ...

That those newly baptized into the one flock of the Lord may rejoice in the salvation that is theirs, we pray to the Lord ...

For all the departed: may they experience the fullness of God's love in eternal life, we pray to the Lord ...

How can we help you in prayer this week?

Let us pray (together)

*Creator God, you make the resplendent glory of the Risen One
shine with new radiance on the world
whenever our human weakness is healed and restored.
Gather all your scattered children into the one flock of Jesus Christ,
so that all may taste the fullness of joy.
We pray this through your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favours today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray as one,
OUR FATHER ...**

Celebrating the Word, Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. (Celebrating the Word was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R. deceased 2012). For information: **website:** www.resurrectionists.ca. **Email:** provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca The Scripture version used in this commentary is the New Revised Standard Version (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).