

Fourth Sunday of Easter



A Blessing for Farmers and Ranchers

Creator God,
you who set the earth in the heavens
and ordered the change of the seasons,
we thank you for new life in the spring.
You who created plants and creatures of all kinds,
we ask your blessing on all
who farm and raise animals.
Be with them as they produce our food.
Give them strength for their hard labor.

Give them wisdom to be good stewards of the land.
Comfort and encourage them
in the midst of bad weather and economic
hardship,
and make us all attentive advocates
of just policies,
so that farmers can thrive
and find joy in their work.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sunday, May 15, 2011 The Good Shepherd

Today's Readings: Acts 2:14a, 36–41; 1 Peter 2:20b–25; John 10:1–10. In today's Gospel, Jesus contrasts himself, the Good Shepherd, with "thieves and bandits . . . who come only to kill and destroy" (John 10:8–10). Jesus is referring to bad religious leaders, but how often do we allow "thieves and bandits" through the gateways of our homes and our minds? This may come as advertising (which makes us feel inferior), broadcasting filled with violence and greed, people who demean us, even the messages we send ourselves: "you're not good enough," ". . . smart enough," and so forth. It's as if we allow a dump truck full of garbage to unload in the living room.

In contrast, Jesus offers himself as a guide who brings us into green pastures filled with abundant life. Can we hear

this Good Shepherd calling our name, or are we too buried in busy-ness and distraction? Jesus never coerces or forces himself. Instead we are drawn to him as to a friend who deeply understands us and believes in our potential, someone we *want* to be near. Sometimes we're confused about what we need most. How consoling to have the one who knows better than we do what we need.

The Good Shepherd "calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (John 10:3). What would that be like? Remember someone beloved calling your name, in tones warm with affirmation. Now magnify that sound, so that it drowns out all the destructive influences and negative voices. Jesus is pleased with you, delights in you, protects you. Celebrate that today!



This Week at Home

Monday, May 16

Making No Distinction

Today in Acts, Peter explains to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem how he came to understand that Christ's message must be extended to the Gentiles. In visions and in direct communication, the Spirit tells Peter "not to make a distinction between them and us." What distinctions are we making between us and others that the Spirit is asking us to abandon? Today's Readings: Acts 11:1-18; John 10:11-18.

Tuesday, May 17

Spring Planting

In today's reading from Acts, we learn that the word is being preached to "Hellenists," or Gentiles, in the city of Antioch. God's word, like a germinating seed, begins to grow as many Gentiles become believers. Is it time for you to do some seed planting? Depending on where you live, spinach, lettuce, and radishes do well while it's still cool. In warmer regions you might plant herbs or tomatoes, even in a few pots on a balcony. As you watch your plants grow, tend also to the new life of the Resurrection growing in your heart. Today's Readings: Acts 11:19-26; John 10:22-30.

Wednesday, May 18

Savoring Easter Silence

In the last verse of today's Gospel, Jesus says: "What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me." To know God's intention and speak it clearly requires spending time in silent reflection, just as Jesus did. Check out the offerings at a retreat center nearby. Or see if any local parishes or monasteries offer quiet days of prayer. Or create your own retreat at home, planning time away from other activities for spiritual reading, prayer, and meditation. Then seize the opportunity, savoring the silence. Today's Readings: Acts 12: 24-13:5a; John 12:44-50.

Thursday, May 19

Spring Salad

To celebrate the spiritual and earthly bounty of the Easter season, make a spinach salad:

Combine 6 cups fresh spinach leaves (stems removed) with 2 cups fresh strawberries, stemmed and halved. Sprinkle with 1 Tbsp. sesame seeds, toasted in a small skillet for 2 to 3 minutes. Serve with your favorite dressing or try this: Mix ¼ cup cider vinegar, 1 Tbsp. lemon juice, ¼ tsp. Dijon mustard, a pinch of sugar, and salt and pepper to taste. With a whisk, beat in ½ cup olive oil or salad oil. Serves 6.

Sing an Alleluia before you eat it! Today's Readings: Acts 13:13-25; John 13:16-20.

Friday, May 20

Optional Memorial of Saint Bernardine of Siena

Although Saint Bernardine (1380-1444) was known chiefly for his preaching throughout Italy, as a young man he cared for plague victims in Siena. Much later in America, Rose Hawthorne (1851-1926), daughter of Nathaniel Hawthorne, author of *The Scarlet Letter*, converted to Catholicism and founded a Dominican community called the Servants of Relief for Incurable Cancer. Today, pray for victims of deadly diseases, their caregivers, and those who research a cure. May the peace of Christ surround them. Today's Readings: Acts 13:26-33; John 14:1-6.

Saturday, May 21

Liturgy of the Hours

Sometimes called the Divine Office, this is an ancient way of punctuating the day with prayer. For centuries, communities of monks and nuns have met seven times a day to chant the psalms and listen to scripture. Lay people can do the same, using the official Liturgy of the Hours or adopting an informal prayer practice. Some set a timer and pause for a few minutes' prayer at set times. Others commit to Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer. Today's Readings: Acts 13:44-52; John 14:7-14.



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Keeping the Seasons

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