

Reflection for 4th Sunday of Easter

Acts 4:8-12

1 John 3:1-2

Gospel John 10:11-18



The good shepherd, the leader who provides, 'life to the full'

The most striking feature of the Liturgy of the Word this Sunday is the commonality of the First Reading and the Gospel in three respects. Firstly, the location, the Temple in Jerusalem. Secondly, the audience, the religious leaders. Thirdly, the event preceding the discourse, a healing.

The allegory of the 'Good Shepherd' should not be read in isolation from the Old Testament references to the shepherds of Israel, who were the political and religious leaders that the prophets denounced. Ezekiel 34 especially, depicts the deplorable leadership of shepherds who broke the commandments; who killed, stole and lied, causing violence and suffering for many:

- shepherds who fed themselves instead of their flock
- shepherds who failed to care for the weak and the sick
- shepherds who ruled with cruelty and violence.

We cannot be blind to our present political leaders who are culpable in the same way as Ezekiel describes, when:

- they engage in the self-interest of the arms trade
- they fail to use human and financial resources for the well and the sick
- they align themselves with foreign governments that inflict war and suffering on their own people and their neighbours.

However, Ezekiel goes on to describe the day when God will become the shepherd leader, 'I, myself will shepherd my people ...' and 'I shall make a covenant of peace with them ...' This is akin to the Psalmist when he says; 'The Lord is my shepherd. There is nothing I shall want.' Today, in the Gospel, Jesus declares that he himself is that shepherd, 'I am the good shepherd.'

This good shepherd is the leader who provides, 'life to the full'. This fullness of life is illustrated in the preceding healing, of the blind man in the Gospel and the lame man in the First Reading. Let us pray today for our political and religious leaders, that their decision-making will bring life, not death.

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