

About the Readings on 4.21.24

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Brought over from the second Sunday after Easter in the medieval one-year lectionary is the beloved Good Shepherd Sunday. Despite the popularity of the image of the lone lamb held in the shepherd's arms, most biblical use of the imagery of sheep intends a communal interpretation. Here, the flock is the focus. On Sunday the flock gathers to eat and drink together.

Acts 4:5-12

Peter's speech describes Jesus as the savior and healer of the crippled man—which can function today as a gloss on the shepherd imagery. An alternate image in this excerpt is the metaphor of the cornerstone, Christ on whom the church is built.

Psalm 23

The most beloved psalm in Christian use, Psalm 23, was interpreted in the fourth century as a description of the baptized life. The green pastures are the time of baptismal catechesis; the still waters are the font; the soul is restored by the infusion of the Spirit; the right pathways are the moral life of the transformed believer; God's rod and staff are our guidance for Christian living; the table is the eucharist, with a cup overflowing with mercy; the house of the Lord is the community of the church, within which we enjoy God's goodness. We thus can think of the first person pronouns—"I" and "me"—as referring to the one body of Christ.

1 John 3:16-24

We are reading in semicontinuous fashion through 1 John. Today's passage echoes the gospel selection that speaks of Christ laying down his life for us. Our baptism calls us now to follow our shepherd by offering ourselves to others.

John 10:11-18

John uses sheep as a communal metaphor for shared abundant life. In John's gospel are eleven passages in which the name of God, I am, is tied to an image, and today's selection includes one of them: I am the model shepherd. In John's christological explication of the metaphor, Christ is not a victim of the wolf, but instead willed of his own power to die for the flock. In Easter we praise Christ, who chose death to save the flock, who now is risen and with us.

