

## The Fourth Sunday of Easter

### Principal Service readings

Acts 9.36-43	Peter heals Tabitha
Psalms 23	The 'Good Shepherd' psalm
Revelation 7.9-17	The rewarding of the saints
John 10.22-30	Jesus says the sheep hear his voice and follow him

### Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,  
speak to our hearts in the stillness,  
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,  
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;  
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

### Gospel Reading

#### *Jesus claims to be the Son of God*

<sup>22</sup>At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, <sup>23</sup>and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. <sup>24</sup>So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.'  
<sup>25</sup>Jesus answered,

'I have told you, and you do not believe.  
The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me;  
<sup>26</sup> but you do not believe,  
because you do not belong to my sheep.  
<sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice.  
I know them, and they follow me.  
<sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.  
No one will snatch them out of my hand.  
<sup>29</sup> What my Father has given me is greater than all else,  
and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand.  
<sup>30</sup> The Father and I are one.'

## Comments and Questions

The Feast of the Dedication celebrated the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem after the desecration of it by Antiochus Epiphanes IV. It was instituted by Judas Maccabeus in 165 B.C. after the Temple had been purified. Do you think this occasion is significant for what Jesus has to say here?

The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is one of the most popular. Why might this be? What other images of Jesus can you think of?

Jesus talks about the shepherd having a strong connection with the sheep. When he talks about those who recognise his voice following him, is he implicitly criticising those who don't recognise it? His audience was pressing him for details of his identity. Do his words contain implicit criticism of their lack of recognition, and would they have noticed?

Jesus also speaks of his identification with the Father (v.30). Reading on the the next verse we can see that some of those listening fetch some stones to stone him, so incensed are they by this statement. Should Jesus have been more careful about what he said?

## Quotations

1

Christ is not valued at all unless he is valued above all.

St Augustine of Hippo 354–430

2

The Lord's sheep will find the Lord's pastures. Those who follow Christ with an undivided heart will be nourished in pastures that are forever green. And what are such pastures if not the most profound joy of feeding in the everlasting fields of paradise? For the pasture of the saints is to see God face to face. When the vision of God never fades, the soul is filled with an abundance of food for eternal life.

from a homily of St Gregory the Great 540–604

<sup>1</sup> *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

## Related topics

*For further study:*

Death/resurrection/paschal mystery; baptism; confirmation; Eucharist; martyrs; redemptive suffering; symbols: cross, water, oil, bread, assembly, white garment, light

## Closing Prayer

Safe in your hand, O God,  
is the flock you shepherd  
through Jesus your Son.

Lead us always to the living waters  
where you promise respite and refreshment,  
that we may be counted among those  
who know and follow you.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, the resurrection and the life,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God for ever and ever.

Collect for the Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year C<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Opening Prayers : Scripture-related Collects for Years A, B and C, from The Sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999. – (The ICEL Collects, 1997)*