

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Open a bible, and light
a candle beside it.
Pray Psalm 23.

LEADER: The Lord is my
shepherd; I shall not want.

ALL: In green pastures God
gives me repose.

LEADER: Besides restful waters
the Holy One leads me and
refreshes my soul.

ALL: You lead me in right paths
for your name's sake.

LEADER: Though I walk through
the darkest valley, I fear no evil
for you are with me.

ALL: With your rod and your
staff, you comfort me.

LEADER: You spread the table
before me in the sight of my
foes.

ALL: You anoint my head with
oil; my cup overflows.

LEADER: Only goodness and
kindness follow me all the days
of my life.

ALL: I shall dwell in the house
of the Holy One for years to
come.

Kids who come to
Overlook Farm, a
Heifer International
Learning Center, love moving
the sheep from one pasture
to another. One person runs
or bikes ahead of the sheep,
rattling food pellets in a pail
to entice the sheep to follow.
Everyone else lines up along the
road to keep the sheep from
going their own ways into other

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fields. Almost always some
sheep, especially lambs, break
away and need to be herded one
by one to the new pasture.

Psalm 23 provides an image
of God as a shepherd who finds
grass and water for the flock,
protects them from wolves,
and gathers in strays. John 10,
Sunday's gospel, sees Jesus as
the good shepherd who knows
his sheep and lays down his life
for the flock.

As Pope Francis shepherds
the Church, he values
walking together with people.
Shepherds accompany their
sheep, seeing and responding
to daily needs. Accompanying
implies process and patience.
"One who accompanies others
has to realize that each person's
situation before God and their
life in grace are mysteries which
no one can fully know from
without" (Joy of the Gospel,
#172).

Pastor is the Latin word for
shepherd. A pastoral person
knows his or her people, pays
attention to them, leads them in
life-giving ways, values keeping
them together, can contend
with differences and threats. A
pastoral person is a relational,
attentive leader who puts people
before legal issues.

Pope Francis calls all the
baptized to form relationships,
accompany each other in living
the gospel and form evangelizing
communities. In the countless
ways Christians live the gospels,
we among the people of God
gather, teach, and lead groups in
our time.

● How do you shepherd others
in your life?

● What do you expect of
pastors?



GOSPEL

Jesus calls us to trust in him.

JESUS 1: Truly, truly I assure you:

Whoever does not enter the sheepfold through the gate but climbs in some other way is a thief and a marauder. The one who enters through the gate is shepherd of the sheep; the keeper opens the gate for him. The sheep hear his voice as he calls his own by name and leads them out.

JESUS 2: When the shepherd has brought out those that are his, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they recognize his voice. They will not follow strangers but run from them because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.

NARRATOR:

Jesus used this figure with his disciples, but they did not grasp what he was trying to tell them.

JESUS 1: I tell you truly, I am the sheepgate. All who came before me are thieves and marauders whom the sheep did not heed. I am the gate. Those who enter through me will be safe. They will go in and out, and find pasture.

JESUS 2: The thief comes only to steal, slaughter, and destroy. I came that my sheep might have life and have it more abundantly.

John 10.1-10



prohibition “only Catholics in good standing can receive communion” tends to alienate rather than welcome family and friends at weddings and funerals. Can divorced and remarried Catholics receive communion? In *Amoris Laetitia* Pope Francis urges using conscience, time, grace, and conversation with pastors for divorced and remarried Catholics. What is the *sense of the faithful*?

● In what circles do you stand out as different? How do you share your experience?

● When have you helped others see more than one side of a contention?

The shepherd allegory offers the enticing intimacy between shepherd and sheep as an image of the relationship between Jesus and believers. The sheep know the shepherd's voice. The shepherd knows the sheep and calls them by name. The shepherd and sheep walk together, live together, make life possible for each other.

The Greek verb *poimano* means *to herd, to lead, to tend* sheep. To herd is the work of gathering and keeping sheep together. To lead is the work of finding pasture and water and taking the sheep to places they can eat, drink, and thrive. A shepherd walks in front of a flock; the sheep imprint and follow.

To tend means staying alert, watching, paying constant attention to every sheep, to their condition and to threats. Anyone who has worked as a lifeguard at a community

How can those who follow Jesus lead today?

John's gospel makes an extended allegory in chapter 10 about shepherds, sheep, and gates. It sets a contentious rather than an idyllic scene.

This chapter follows the conflicts the man born blind faces as neighbors and Pharisees question who gave him sight (John 9). His faith in Jesus gets the man put out of the synagogue. John's gospel reflects tensions in the last decades of the first century between Jews who follow Jesus and those who continue to follow the law of Moses.

In these struggles the Christian community identifies Jesus with Wisdom, who was with

God from the beginning and was God, who became human and dwelt among us (John 1.14). To other Jews this is blasphemous, reason to put believers out of the synagogue.

More than ten times John's gospel puts statements in Jesus' mouth that use the divine name to identify him with God. *I am* the good shepherd. *I am* the sheepgate. *I am* the resurrection and life. *I am* the bread come down from heaven. *I am* the way, the truth, and the life.

Today we contend with our own tensions. Will the Catholic Church ordain women deacons? What about intercommunion with other Christians? The

pool or beach knows the active attention that tending demands.

In Joy of the Gospel Pope Francis urges us to take on the smell of the sheep. “An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s lives, bridges distances, is willing to abase itself, and embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the ‘smell of the sheep’ and the sheep are willing to hear their voice” (24).

Pope Francis brings into our world fresh assurance the Spirit is at work in us. He laid out four guides in his first encyclical Joy of the Gospel. He has put them into action in his work to decentralize the Church and learn from the synods he has called. The principles put his faith in the Holy Spirit into action.

First, time is greater than space. We live between the now of each moment and the lure of fulfillment we can imagine. To build and develop character or communities requires time and process. Growth takes time. Peace takes time.

Second, unity is greater than conflict. “The Spirit can harmonize every diversity,” Pope Francis writes in his encyclical *Laudato Si’*. We humans are all



creatures of Earth who can come together to repair our common home. We can negotiate differences rather than insist on our way or no way.

Third, realities are greater than ideas. *Amoris Laetitia* envisions Christian life and marriage unfolding as a process and divorced people needing ongoing support rather than being cut off from the Church community. People need time to open their hearts to grace.

Fourth, the whole is greater than the part. This guideline challenges us to see the world is global and local. It calls us to broaden our horizons and see the greater good that will benefit us all, yet to work on a small scale in our own neighborhoods.

● **What do you value in Pope Francis’s guidelines?**

● **What kind of time has grace needed in your life?**

The Sunday liturgies after Easter reflect the Church’s desire to further form those who have been baptized and received into the community during the Easter Vigil. The catechumens’ journey to faith

and baptism only begins their Christian lives. After Easter neophytes enter the final phase of initiation called mystagogia, continuing reflection on their experience of worshiping and praying with the community.

The research of James Fowler sees faith developing in three adult stages. Typically adolescents and college students question the faith they inherit from family and the community where they grow up. Young adults critically examine their faith and deliberately choose who and what to believe in. Sorting out who I am makes either/or and them/us thinking typical of this stage.

People secure in their own faith commitments grow into another stage, becoming able to listen to others and the many sides of issues. They work at recognizing and appreciating where others come from, why they think and feel as they do. They cross boundaries, work toward common ground in parishes and governing bodies, and live in broader relationships. Both/and typifies thinking at this stage.

In the third adult stage believers become so like Christ that they have an inspiring and renewing presence among



us. They are our saints, those canonized and those who bless our families and communities. They welcome and open themselves to all.

● **Where do you see yourself?**

● **Where in your life do you need to change—to listen, to deepen, to heal, to reform?**

● **Who is the person most like Christ that you know?**



The good news is for the nations.

Peter's first sermon lasts about two minutes. As a result, 3,000 people become Christians through baptism. Sunday's first reading from Acts describes their moment of conversion.

Peter's preaching deeply shakes his hearers. In fact, literally, the text says his words pierced to the heart. This is the only place a New Testament writer uses the Greek word *katanusso*, which describes a deep penetration or stab wound. The word indicates that something sudden and unexpected penetrates people's self-awareness.

"What shall we do?" they ask. Their moment of conversion arrives. Like the newly baptized in our midst, these listeners have heard the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. They must act to bring it to fulfillment.

Peter's response is precise and concise, "You must repent and be baptized!" Repentance is an essential part of a genuine conversion. Baptism is a public demonstration of faith. Christians cannot live as closet believers in the risen Christ.

Peter expects his hearers to make a hard decision, to choose something that was not politically correct in their day. He expects them to turn their back on the norms of their society, to go against the flow, and to make a public commitment to Jesus Christ. Peter leaves no place for any hiding or hedging.

What are we to do?

On the day of Pentecost Peter stood up with the eleven, raised his voice, and addressed them: "Let the whole house of Israel know beyond any doubt that God has made both Lord and Messiah this Jesus whom you crucified."

When people heard this, they were deeply shaken. They asked Peter and the other apostles, "What are we to do, brothers?" Peter answered: "Repent and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, that your sins may be forgiven; then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. God's promise is for you, your children, and all who are far away, all whom the Lord our God calls."

In support of his testimony he used many other arguments, and kept urging, "Save yourselves from this generation which has gone astray." Those who accepted his message were baptized; some three thousand were added that day.

Acts of the Apostles 2.14,36-41

● **When have you experienced a moment of conversion?**

PRAY

Conclude your reflection on Sunday's scripture by reaffirming your baptismal vows.

LEADER: Come, let us all reaffirm our common baptism, declaring our allegiance to the risen Christ and our continuing commitment to follow him. We pledge ourselves again to live out the fullness of our baptism.

ALL: With God's help we will continue in the community of faith, in the apostles' teaching, in the breaking of bread and the prayers.

With God's help we will continue to seek Christ in all people, to love our neighbor as our self.

With God's help we will continue to proclaim and live the good news, to work and pray for justice and peace, to respect the dignity of every creature.

LEADER: This is our pledge, for this we were baptized.

Offer each other a blessing of peace.



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