

# Season of EASTER



## Prayers

### Collect of the Day

Almighty God, merciful Father, since You have wakened from death the Shepherd of Your sheep, grant us Your Holy Spirit that when we hear the voice of our Shepherd we may know Him who calls us each by name and follow where He leads; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### Scripture Readings

Psalm 23 (antiphon v. 1)

Acts 2:42-47

1 Peter 2:19-25

John 10:1-10

### Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 709

Other Hymns – 602 (FR), 711 (G, E), 740 (G), 710, 864

Invited by the Good Shepherd, our risen Lord Jesus Christ, let us come before His throne of mercy and grace in prayer on behalf of all people according to their needs.

Blessed Shepherd, You established Your Church by Your sacrificial death and glorious resurrection. Grant us devotion that we may abide in the teaching of the apostles and honour the fellowship of the Church. Guard us against all enemies of Your Word, and keep us within the care of Your flock and staff forever more. Lord in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Mighty Shepherd, You hold in Your hands all the might of man, and You hold accountable those who would govern Your people. Grant to us good government and good leaders who will honour Your purpose, protect Your people, and serve the cause of justice and freedom against all threats. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Shepherd, You loved this sinful world to the point of shedding Your blood, and desire that all would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Inspire and equip Your Church and her ministers to speak faithfully and boldly Your Word, and bless all those who serve us on Your behalf. Bless us especially when we are persecuted for the faith or suffer for the sake of the good that honours You and Your Word. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Shepherd, You have taught us to love all that is good, right and true. Bless all artists and artisans, composers and musicians, craftsmen and writers, that they may employ all their skills for Your glory and in service to the Gospel that the arts may testify to Your saving death and resurrection. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

*cont'd on next page*

Merciful Shepherd, Your wounds are our healing and Your voice calls us to You in time of need. Hear us on behalf of all those who suffer in body or mind, who grieve those they love, and to whom death draws near. We pray especially for \_\_\_\_\_ and those we name in our hearts. Grant them healing according to Your will, grace to sustain them in the day of trouble, and hope of the new and everlasting life to come. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious Shepherd, You seek out those who have fallen and restore sinners to repentance. Send forth Your Spirit to rekindle faith in the hearts of those who have fallen away from the truth or who have been overcome by temptation and sin. Increase in us and others a hunger and a desire to be fed with the green pastures of Your Word. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Good Shepherd, You have again set Your table among us in the presence of our enemies. Grant that we may so receive Your body and blood with faith and a repentant heart. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Risen Lord Jesus Christ, we pray You to hear Your sheep and answer our prayers with mercy, granting us those things profitable for us and our salvation and keeping from us all things harmful; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**



# EASTER SERMON

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER  
(Series A)

**Sermon Text: John 10:1-10**

*“The Good Shepherd”*

In the chapter previous to today’s Gospel Reading we read as follows: “Jesus heard that [the Pharisees] had cast [out of the synagogue the man blind from birth, the man Jesus healed by removing his blindness], and having found [this man, Jesus] said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ [The newly healed man, who had been blind, when he first met Jesus] answered, ‘And who is He, sir, that I may believe in Him?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen Him, and it is He who is speaking to you.’ [The man whose eyes Jesus had healed] said, ‘Lord, I believe,’ and he worshipped [Jesus]. Jesus said, ‘For judgement I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.’ Some of the Pharisees near [Jesus] heard these things, and said to Him, ‘Are we also blind?’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.’”

This exchange immediately precedes what we hear today; namely, Jesus’ words: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”

All that business with the man blind from birth comes just before these words of Jesus about Him being the true Shepherd of the sheep. And context is important, for how things fit together can tell you a lot. The man Jesus healed who was blind from birth could not see Jesus, but he listened to Jesus’ voice and followed Jesus’ voice as Jesus led the man to sight, not just physical sight but spiritual sight.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, had everything laid out in front of them with witnesses, but they refused to see. So when you put into the mix everything that came immediately before today’s Gospel Reading, it quickly becomes clear that the Pharisees are the “thieves and robbers” who have “climbed into the sheepfold by another way.” In the minds and hearts of the

people, they are trying to hold the place appointed for the Old Testament Levitical priesthood. In Jesus' day, however, the Levitical priesthood was generally comprised of a group called the Sadducees. These were the religious liberals of the day and in many ways had abandoned and rejected key aspects of their responsibilities, becoming bad under-shepherds of the true Shepherd—the Lord God of Israel Himself—abandoning their role for the 'greener pastures' of Greek philosophy and political influence. We hear today David calling the Lord God the Shepherd in Psalm 23. We hear the same from the prophet Ezekiel who levels a similar condemnation as Jesus does against the wicked under-shepherds of his day who mistreated and neglected the sheep in their care. In the case of the Pharisees, instead of reforming the system, they sought to usurp the Sadducees and replace them as the teachers and shepherds of the children of Israel. Instead of encouraging the Sadducees to be faithful in their vocational task, the Pharisees tried to influence the people for their own ends. And with the result that this poor sheep—the man blind from birth—is caught in the middle of it all, and Jesus the true Good Shepherd is dropped into the middle of it all too.

Let's take a minute and mull over how, on the one hand, a considerable part of the account of the healing of the man born blind, which relates to today's Gospel Reading; and the context of Jesus' words about the shepherding of God's people is focused on the role of his parents in this whole situation. Remember how his mother and father, when questioned by the Pharisees about their son, throw him under the bus out of fear of being rejected by the Pharisees and maybe being tossed out of the synagogue as well. Being a parent is sometimes very difficult. Mothers and fathers can be put into bad situations like this man's parents were. And this leads us to another thing to think about: that is, this account of the man blind from birth and his mother and father, with Jesus in the centre of the whole thing, reveals an aspect of parenting that is obvious but not always pointed out; namely, parenting is very much like shepherding.

Using the vocation of mother and father as an example, think about it: from the point of conception a woman with child is tasked with motherhood. She is to nurture and protect her child through the pregnancy, through infancy, through childhood, even through adulthood and past the point when children stop wanting to be shepherded. Likewise, the father is tasked with being there with his wife to protect and support mother and child and to guide the child by raising him or her up in the fear of the Lord. What does the book of Proverbs say regarding this? "Train up a child in the way he should go; [and] even when he is old he will not depart from it." So in our world we will see situations where there are going to be mothers and fathers who, like the Sadducees, reject or misuse their role of parent. And there are going to be people, like the Pharisees, who try to horn in on the responsibilities of father and mother—people who can be bad influences on children. Parents need, as such, always be careful of those who are trying to 'parent' their children for them; for as Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber." And then this warning: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy."

Of Himself, however, Jesus our Good Shepherd says, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." Regardless, therefore, of the age of your children; don't neglect your responsibilities as parents. Watch that no one is climbing in by another way. And remember what St. Paul teaches, "I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named." And again, "There is one body and one Spirit—one Lord, one faith, one

baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” Or as Psalm 127 says: “Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord the fruit of the womb a reward.”

So what about this man blind from birth and his parents? We don't know whatever happened with this man or his father and mother after the events recorded by St. John. Did he reject his mother and father because they refused to stick up for him? Did he forgive them even though they had failed to defend him against the wolves in shepherd's clothing—those Pharisees who were casting their son out of their sheepfold? We just don't know. As one healed by Christ Jesus who presumably became a lifelong follower of the Good Shepherd; as one who heard Jesus' voice and followed Him and what He taught—we would hope that this man always sought to be reconciled with his parents, that he would have always honour them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them even if it was challenging to do so.

Let's keep with this illustration a bit longer. If you are a father or mother you know that you need forgiveness for the times you failed at being a parent, for the times you failed at faithfully shepherding your children through life. If you are not a parent but you are a child—that's everyone by the way; then we too will have times when we need to ask forgiveness for breaking the Fourth Commandment, for not honouring our father and mother, for the times when we've refused to receive their guidance and the shepherding they've provided. Then, too, we also need to forgive our father and mother for the times that they provided bad guidance or no guidance, for the times when they sinned against us, when they abandoned us to the dangers of the world. And for those who have usurped spiritual authority and appointed themselves into positions of authority without the blessing and command of God—they need to be brought to repentance; and when, by the grace of God, this repentance comes they need forgiveness for the theft, death and destruction they have perpetrated falsely in God's name.

Let's bring this back around again to Jesus. Later as Jesus was drawing ever closer to His crucifixion; He stopped on the Mount of Olives looking towards Jerusalem and said: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” Jesus describes Himself here as a ‘mother hen’ with chicks under the wing—another illustration of Jesus and His shepherding. Keep that in mind and hear again His words from today's Gospel: “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the Door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.” And in the verses immediately following He also says, “I am the Good Shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me, just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.” And further: “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand.”

Dear mothers, be comforted by these words; and you fathers, stand firm on them—for these are the words of your Lord and Master. If you as parents have had a baptized child snatched out of your hands, remember that Jesus has that child in His hands. If you as a baptized child have been snatched out of your mother's hands and out of your father's house; remember that you are not left to wander in life. You are in Jesus' hands. You have a place in your heavenly Father's House.

Today and every day, remember that Jesus is the true Good Shepherd. In Him there is forgiveness—forgiveness for a rebellious spirit, forgiveness for failure to faithfully care for those you are responsible for, forgiveness for poor shepherding, forgiveness for rejecting the kind shepherding provided to you in love, forgiveness for interfering with the vocational responsibilities of others, forgiveness for climbing into the sheepfold by another way, forgiveness for being a lost, wandering sheep. Here in the season of Easter, and always, remember that all this forgiveness flows from the risen Lord Jesus—from the One who, unlike the Sadducees and Pharisees, who, unlike the parents of the man born blind, laid down His life for the sheep in His care at the cross on Good Friday and picked that life back up again on Easter morning so that there will be one flock in Him.

Now, you may have a laundry list of things that may suddenly have sprung to your mind when hearing that Jesus forgives sin of every kind. You're a bad child? Ask Him for forgiveness. You're a bad father or mother? Ask Him for forgiveness. You pride yourself on being a good child or a good parent? Remember what the Scriptures say: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." And that Jesus our Good Shepherd is the Truth.

And so, listen to the Good Shepherd's voice when He says, "I am the Good Shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me." Listen to the Good Shepherd's voice when He says, "I lay down My life for the sheep. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand." Listen to Jesus say to you today, 'If everyone else in the world rejects you, trust that I will not reject you.' After all, as the 'Mother Hen' He comes to you "with healing in His wings"—those wings, those arms, stretched out for you at the cross of His crucifixion which has atoned for and covers all your sins. And if everyone else in the world rejects you, He is your Good Shepherd 'who restores your soul . . . who leads you in paths of righteousness for His name's sake . . . who is with you in the valley of the shadow of death . . . who comforts you and prepares a table for you . . . who anoints your head with oil and follows you all the days of your life so that you shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever . . . who, if you are lost, goes after you until He finds you . . . who puts you on His shoulder rejoicing and carries you home'—to His heavenly home.

And so, mothers: look to Jesus. Fathers: look to Jesus. Children: look to Jesus. And whether you are a parent or not, in life we are all tasked in different ways to look after each other. And, keeping this in mind, remember what Jesus says: "Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them." And look to Jesus to see how it's done, and then do it, turning always to Him for forgiveness when you fail—keeping in mind that, as Martin Luther put it: "The law says 'Do this,' and it is never done. Grace says, 'believe in this' and everything is already done."

Yes, in Jesus everything is done and it is all done well. With the man blind from birth who miraculously received his sight, with all who hear Jesus' voice and follow Him; trust that He has done it all for you and your forgiveness is secure in Him. In His risen and ascended hands He holds forgiveness for death, destruction and rejection; forgiveness for abandonment and neglect; forgiveness for anger and selfishness; forgiveness for stubbornness and dishonour; forgiveness for all of it—and, in that forgiveness, you have life, abundant and eternal life. After all, He is our Good Shepherd, our Life, the Door of salvation, the Voice that calls you home. And pray that

those entrusted with your care—be they pastors or parents—would thus be faithful under-shepherds of the Good Shepherd. Amen.