

Homily for the Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year A

April 26, 2026

St. Bavo Parish

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First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 2:14a, 36-41 (God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ.)

Responsory: Psalm 23 (The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.)

Second Reading: 1 Peter 2:20b-25 (You had gone astray like sheep, but have returned.)

Gospel: John 10:1-10 (Jesus is the true Shepherd and the gate of the sheepfold.)

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is commonly referred to as “Good Shepherd Sunday,” for obvious reasons. In all three years of the Lectionary cycle, the gospel for this Sunday comes from the discourse in which Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd, who gives his life for his sheep. Of course, that biblical image of the shepherd did not originate with Jesus. It goes back many centuries and is found throughout the Old Testament, including in today’s responsorial psalm: “The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.” Yet, the shepherd image reaches its greatest expression and its greatest *fulfillment* in Jesus.

The Old Testament frequently refers to the chosen people of Israel as God’s sheep or God’s flock. God the Shepherd, by his own initiative, called a people to be his own and then made a covenant to bind them to himself forever. God promised to lead them, instruct them and protect them, and also to discipline them whenever they went astray. For their part, the people pledged their obedience to God’s commandments. They promised to listen to the voice of their Divine Shepherd and walk faithfully in the way that he showed them.

It seems, though, that God never intended to do all the shepherding *by himself*. In every age, he has raised up *leaders from among the people* and appointed them as shepherds over the flock. *Moses* was the first. He led the Israelites out of Egypt and guided them on their long journey to the Promised Land. During that trek, he shepherded the people by instructing them in God’s commandments, holding them accountable to the covenant, and interceding with God to provide for their basic needs and to pardon them when they sinned. Once the Israelites entered the Promised Land, as a loose confederation of tribes, they needed a different kind of shepherd. God appointed a succession of “*Judges*” to protect them from their adversaries and to offer them an example of piety and faithfulness to the Lord. Later, during the time of the Jewish Monarchy, the *Kings* of Judah and Israel took on the role of shepherd, though many failed miserably. Finally, during the Exile in Babylon, the *rabbis*, or religious teachers, became the new shepherds of Israel. But they also lost their way, by misinterpreting the Scriptures or deliberately manipulating them to their own advantage.

In today’s gospel, *Jesus* claims the title of Shepherd for himself, and he accuses the religious leaders of his day of being nothing more than “thieves and robbers,” imposters who wish to exploit the sheep for their own benefit. Jesus’ claim is so audacious, and his criticism so bold, that the Pharisees don’t even grasp what Jesus is saying about himself and about them. He is blatantly usurping their authority as the appointed shepherds of Israel, declaring that *he alone* is worthy to lead this flock. The rabbis who came before him are unworthy, because their main concern is *not* the welfare of the sheep, but rather, the respect, honors and obedience which *they demand from the sheep*. Jesus, by contrast, was sent into the world for a *single*

purpose – to give up his life in order to save the flock from their sins and give them the hope of eternal life.

In our day, God continues to raise up shepherds from among his people. However, both shepherds and sheep must always remember that *Christ is the one Divine Shepherd* who leads us all. The people follow us earthly shepherds, and we lead them to Christ. That is the vocation of an ordained minister in a nutshell. Jesus says that he calls his sheep by name, and they recognize his voice and follow him. That is precisely what happens when we priests proclaim Christ's message faithfully to the people, speaking his unvarnished truth at all times. It takes courage, though, because sometimes the unvarnished truth of the Gospel is not what people want to hear. Some would prefer a more *lenient* Gospel, to justify their complacency. Others want a *harsher*, more judgmental Gospel, rather than one that constantly challenges them to be merciful. Still others would like a *distorted* Gospel, which conforms to their political views or their prejudices. But, the shepherd's task is not to cater to other people's opinions nor to impose his own opinions. His task is always to let the voice of the Divine Shepherd be heard, so that none may be led astray.

The sheep remain safe and secure as long as they hear the Divine Shepherd's voice and follow him. So, we must be careful not to allow the noise of the world and the deceptive calls of false shepherds to drown out the voice of the true Shepherd. We also must be willing to follow wherever the Good Shepherd leads us, placing all our trust in him. At times, we may be unsure whether a verdant pasture lies right around the corner, or whether he will instead lead us through more dark valleys first. If we become fearful and turn back, then we just make things harder for ourselves. It is always better to rely on Him than to try to cope with all of life's problems on our own. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, knows how to lead us securely and care for us along the way.

At the end of today's gospel, however, Jesus switches up his metaphors. He calls himself the *gate* of the sheepfold, the passage by which the sheep "come in and go out and find pasture." In other words, Jesus is *the way* to freedom and salvation. He says: "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly." Jesus is suggesting that he doesn't just *open* the gate to eternal life and *direct* the sheep to pass through it; he himself *is* the gate. And that has implications for our discipleship. If he merely opened the gate by means of his sacrifice on the cross and called the sheep out by means of his teachings, then salvation could be achieved simply by following those teachings and living a good, moral life. But if Jesus himself *is the gate*, then the way to salvation entails more than just following his instruction. We, the members of the flock, must seek *communion with him*. To have life through him, we must *remain* in Christ, and he must remain in us. And that means not only *obeying* his commands but also *approaching* him with love and devotion. May all of us, sheep and shepherds alike, bind ourselves closely to Jesus, our Good Shepherd and our gateway to eternal life. Let us strive to listen to his voice, follow his lead, and live in communion with him always.