

# FAITH CIRCLES

WEEKLY SMALL  
GROUP CATECHESIS

4TH SUNDAY OF EASTER • YEAR A



## SUNDAY GOSPEL

### *Good Shepherds*

*John 10:1-10*

Jesus said: 'I tell you most solemnly, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold through the gate, but gets in some other way is a thief and brigand. The one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the flock; the gatekeeper lets him in, the sheep hear his voice, one by one he calls his own sheep and leads them out. When he has brought out his flock, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow because they know his voice. They never follow

a stranger but run away from him: they do not recognise the voice of strangers.'

Jesus told them this parable but they failed to understand what he meant by telling it to them. So Jesus spoke to them again: 'I tell you most solemnly, I am the gate of the sheepfold. All others who have come are thieves and brigands; but the sheep took no notice of them. I am the gate. Anyone who enters through me will be safe: he will go freely in and out and be sure of finding pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full.' ■

## GOSPEL REFLECTION

*by Trish McCarthy*

Can you imagine a small area maybe ten or twenty square meters marked out by a hand crafted stone wall. There is a small section left open- about the width of a sheep. Atop the length of the wall are thorn bushes which take the height of the structure to about 1.5 meters. Once the sheep have been carefully and mindfully lead (not driven from behind) into the fold, the Shepherd lays across the small entrance to keep watch. There is a familiarity, trust and tenderness about the interaction between them; the way they speak, listen, respond and depend on each other.

If someone from outside were to 'break in' they would have to do so in quite a violent manner; overcoming the multiple layers of defence including the shepherd. Of course, if the shepherd were absent in the sheep's life, it would be much easier to attack the sheep who would be quite vulnerable. As we grow in relationship with Jesus, influences that seek to lead us away from God's love often come quite violently – urgency, impatience and confusion are but few of the signs of this intrusion. God's leading voice of love in our life is one we can trust and is marked by peace, gentleness and sense of rightness. ■

## A WORD FROM POPE FRANCIS

The Evangelist John presents us, on this Fourth Sunday of the Easter Season, with the image of Jesus the Good Shepherd. In contemplating this page of the Gospel, we can understand the kind of relationship that Jesus had with his disciples: a relationship based on tenderness, love, mutual knowledge and the promise of an immeasurable gift: “I came”, Jesus said, “that they may have life, and have it to the full”. This relationship is the model for relations between Christians and for human relationships.

Today, too, as in the time of Jesus, many put themselves forward as “shepherds” of our lives; but only the Risen One is the true Shepherd, who gives us life in abundance. I invite everyone to place their trust in the Lord who guides us. But he not only guides us: he accompanies us, he walks with us. Let us listen to his Word with minds and hearts

opened, to nourish our faith, enlighten our conscience and follow the teaching of the Gospel.

Once I read something very beautiful on how the People of God help the bishops and priests to be good shepherds. It is a writing of St Caesarius of Arles, a Father of the first centuries of the Church. He explained how the People of God must help the pastor, and he gave this example: when a calf is hungry it goes to the cow, its mother, to get milk. The cow, however, does not give it right away: it seems that she withholds it. And what does the calf do? It knocks with its nose at the cow’s udder, so that the milk will come. It is a beautiful image! “So also you must be with your pastors”, this saint said: “always knock at their door, at their hearts, that they may give you the milk of doctrine, the milk of grace and the milk of guidance”.

And I ask you, please, bother the pastors, disturb the pastors, all of us pastors, so that we might give you the milk of grace, doctrine and guidance. Bother them! Think of that beautiful image of the little calf, how it bothers its mother so that she might give it something to eat.

In imitation of Jesus, every pastor “will sometimes go before his people, pointing the way and keeping their hope vibrant. At other times, he will simply be in their midst with his unassuming and merciful presence. At yet other times, he will have to walk after them, helping those who lag behind”. May all pastors be so! But you must bother your pastors so that they may provide the guidance of doctrine and grace. ■

### TALKING POINTS

1. In today’s gospel we hear Jesus say that he has come to bring us life and life to the full. What does fullness of life or life in abundance mean for you? In what ways does Jesus lead you into experiencing this reality?
2. Trish McCarthy in her reflection invites us to realise that we can recognise God’s presence and guidance through feelings of gentleness, peace and ‘rightness’ within decisions. Does this ring true for you? How do you sense Jesus being a shepherd in your life?

### PRAYER POINTS

**Pray for each other:** Ask about and pray for the needs of the group members. Individuals might pray for themselves or ask someone else to pray for them.

**Reflect:** Pope Francis, in his reflection suggests that our relationship with Jesus can be one based on tenderness, love and mutual knowledge. Spend some time in quiet contemplation of the relationship you have with Jesus – ask Jesus to fill you with this sense of closeness.

**Response:** *Jesus, the good shepherd, lead us.*

**Closing Prayer:** Jesus, we thank you for being the leader and guide in our lives. Fill us with a deep sense of your closeness and love as we continue our journey with you and each other.

