

JESUS, THE GOOD SHEPHERD

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is often called “Good Shepherd Sunday”. Each year of the three-year cycle of Sunday readings we read from Chapter 10 of John’s Gospel where Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd.

In the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) the image of the shepherd caring for the sheep is often used to describe God’s care for the People of Israel. Perhaps the best known example is Psalm 22, “The Lord is my shepherd”.

The shepherd image was also applied to the kings and leaders of the people. David was often called the Shepherd King. The Prophet Ezekiel in chapter 34 is another who applied the image to God but also contrasted God’s care for the people with the failure of the leaders.

In fact, Ezekiel chapter 34 provided the background for this part of John’s Gospel where Jesus condemns the Jewish leaders for their failure to see and then declares that he is the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:11-18).

The Good Shepherd is the one who lays down his life for the sheep in contrast to the hired hand who abandons the flock.

As we listen to today’s Gospel, we are reminded that we belong to the flock for whom Jesus laid down his life and that leads us to reflect on what it means to belong.

A key part of our belonging to the flock is summed up in our being known by the shepherd and us knowing the shepherd.

As Brendan Byrne SJ reflects in his book *Life Abounding, A Reading of John’s Gospel*, in John’s Gospel that mutual knowledge is not merely an intellectual knowledge. It is also about mutual love and interpersonal experience.

Next Sunday we turn to another image, the vine and the branches (Jn 15:1-8) that further explores that interpersonal bond.

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