

Reflecting
on the Fourth Sunday of Easter



Archdiocese of
Liverpool

Prepare to be attentive to *The God Who Speaks in this story.*



- Light a candle or tea light if possible.
- Perhaps place daffodils, leaves or a flower from the garden next to the light.

Begin by praying this prayer requested by Archbishop Malcolm:



God Our Father,
each person is precious to You.
You are the Giver of life.
Have mercy on us and protect us at this time,
as the coronavirus threatens health and life.
You are an ever-present Helper in time of trouble.
Watch over those who are suffering,
give strength to those who are aiding the sick
and give courage to all in this time of anxiety.
We ask this of you in the name of your Son.
Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Now, breathe deeply and allow yourself to become still.

Let the music, *If You Believe*, help you to relax.



If you believe, then God will set you free.
If you believe, then God will set you free.
If you believe, He sent His only son to live and die, to
live and die.

If you believe, then God will set you free.
If you believe, then God will set you free.
If you believe, He died to save us all - for you and me,
for you and me.
If you believe .
If you believe.

If you believe, then God will set you free.
If you believe, then God will set you free.
If you believe, He died and rose again to give new life,
to give new life.

If you believe, then God will set you free.
If you believe, then God will set you free.
If you believe, His Holy Spirit rests in you and me, in
you and me.

If you believe.
If you believe.
If you believe.

Ask for God's grace and light to fill your heart and your
mind as you open to the Word.



**Spend some time just looking at the three
images.**

- Where is your eye drawn to?
- What feelings are you experiencing?
- What are you noticing?



Pray the Responsorial Psalm *Valleys of Green.*



*The Lord ever be my shepherd;
nothing more shall I want.
You lead me along the path of right
according to your word.*

To follow the path beside you;
nothing more shall I want.
In valleys of green you let me lie,
to restful waters you lead me

*The Lord ever be my shepherd;
nothing more shall I want.
You lead me along the path of right
according to your word.*

If ever I walk in darkness,
nothing more would I fear.
For there at my side you will stand.
Your staff will give me courage.

*The Lord ever be my shepherd;
nothing more shall I want.
You lead me along the path of right
according to your word.*

A banquet you set before me
under the eyes of my foes.
And over my head you pour your oil;
my cup is flowing over.

*The Lord ever be my shepherd;
nothing more shall I want.
You lead me along the path of right
according to your word.*

Now, either read slowly to yourself the story below or better still, read it aloud, again slowly.

From the Gospel according to John 10:1 – 10



'Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice.

He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.' Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

The Gospel of the Lord.



Now revisit the part of the story that seems to be most important for you.

Read this part a second time, aloud if possible, and allow it to nourish you before reading Fr Chris Thomas' reflection...



One of the most powerful experiences of Church I have ever had took place in inner city Liverpool. The people who lived in the Parish I was working in didn't have a great deal. Very few of them were professional people and very few of them had jobs. In virtually every home there were crises. They had to face severe vandalism and drug problems. They had to cope with infestations of rats and mice. There wasn't a great deal going for them in the eyes of the world.

What they did have was a real faith in God and a faith in each other. What they were willing to do was share with one another and help one another as best as they were able. I came across more unsung heroes in a square mile than I have ever found anywhere else. People who were willing to give time to one another and look after one another. It was a powerful experience of community which spilled over into Church.

For the Church to be effective, we are to be groups of people who care about one another, groups of people who are willing to share life with one another. Is that maybe the gift of COVID-19? People have been forced to re-assess and look out for their neighbour. One of the most powerful things that happened when I was parish priest in Southport took place because we had to move out of the church when it was being re-ordered. We celebrated Mass in the parish hall. The number of people who said to me they had met

people and spoken to people they had never spoken to before was amazing. Relationship and sharing of life, is what makes church. It's not buildings or institutions.

That's the model that Jesus gives us in today's Gospel. The sheep know the shepherd, they hear his voice and they follow him. When he brings out his flock they follow. He leads and they follow not necessarily understanding or knowing where they are going but they trust his love. It's all about relationship. It's all about being together, responding to the Lord who has told us to love one another.

The high point of the Gospel comes at the end when Jesus says, 'I have come that they might have life and have it to the full'. That fullness of life only comes through relationship with God and one another. If you want to experience life in its fullness then open up to other people, be vulnerable with them, trust them. Then you'll find life.

It's a sad fact that we have said to be a member of the Church is about assenting to credal formulae. We have said it is about knowing the doctrine and dogma that we should know but the truth is that those things don't save anyone from anything. The only thing that brings life is relationship. Church is about relationship. What does that mean? It means that we are to take risks and begin welcoming people. It means that we are to be compassionate and understanding to the divorced and remarried, to people with HIV, to the mentally ill, to the drug addicts, to the LGBT community. It means that we are to care for one another and through that caring show the world the power of love.

The voice of the shepherd calling people to love will be heard through our relationships. Let's pray for the courage to open ourselves up to one another and allow life and life in its fullness to flow through us.



Read through the poem written by Malcolm Guite.

I Am the Door of the Sheepfold

Not one that's gently hinged or deftly hung,
Not like the ones you planed at Joseph's place,
Not like the well-oiled openings that swung
So easily for Pilate's practiced pace,
Not like the ones that closed in Mary's face
From house to house in brimming Bethlehem,
Not like the one that no man may assail,
The dreadful curtain, The forbidding veil
That waits your breaking in Jerusalem.



Not one you made but one you have become:
Load-bearing, balancing, a weighted beam
To bridge the gap, to bring us within reach
Of your high pasture. Calling us by name,
You lay your body down across the breach,
Yourself the door that opens into home.

As a result of your reflection, offer some prayers of intercession for the people and situations in our world today that seem to you to be most in need. You may like to include one or more of the following:



We pray for Pope Francis ... our inspiring leader through these challenging days ... and for our Archbishop Malcolm, all our bishops, priests and deacons and the many lay people ministering within our communities at this time ... that they be blessed with strength and courage to meet the new demands presented by COVID-19.

We pray for all who care for the sick and dying, the elderly and the vulnerable ... may they be encouraged and sustained by your love and the prayer of our communities.

We pray for those who are grieving at this time and for all who suffer from anxiety and depression as a result of our current crisis ... may they know the tender embrace of our loving Shepherd who will lead us all into green pastures.

We pray for ourselves and our loved ones as we live another period of rigorous lockdown ... that despite the days when we struggle to believe it will ever end we may be blessed with the gifts of joy, hope and love.

We pray now in the words Jesus gave us:

Our Father,
who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

To end your time of reflection, listen to *Hail Redeemer, King Devine!*



Hail Redeemer, King divine!
Priest and Lamb, the throne is thine;
King, whose reign shall never cease,
Prince of everlasting peace.

*Angels, saints and nations sing:
"Praise be Jesus Christ our King;
Lord of life, earth, sky and sea,
King of love on Calvary!"*

King, whose name creation thrills,
rule our minds, our hearts, our wills;
till in peace, each nation rings
with thy praises, King of kings.

*Angels, saints and nations sing:
"Praise be Jesus Christ our King;
Lord of life, earth, sky and sea,
King of love on Calvary!"*

King most holy, King of truth,
guide the lowly, guide the youth;
Christ thou King of glory bright,
be to us eternal light.

*Angels, saints and nations sing:
"Praise be Jesus Christ our King;
Lord of life, earth, sky and sea,
King of love on Calvary!"*

Shepherd-king, o'er mountains steep
homeward bring the wand'ring sheep;
shelter in one royal fold
states and kingdoms, new and old.

*Angels, saints and nations sing:
"Praise be Jesus Christ our King;
Lord of life, earth, sky and sea,
King of love on Calvary!"*

Acknowledgements

Cover image: stock photo - detail of stained glass window of Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd.

If You Believe (then God will set you free).
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Images on page 4 (clockwise from left): One of the earliest depictions of Jesus the Good Shepherd in the Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome; Good Shepherd icon, public domain; photography by Sean Murphy.

Responsorial Psalm:
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