

Fourth Sunday of Easter

The Good Shepherd

INTRODUCTION

A shepherd's lonely job was to find food for his sheep and to protect them from wild animals. In summer there was very little grass to eat, and often he had to travel long distances with his flock, searching for pasture. At night he would gather his sheep into a fold, and then lie across the entrance to make a 'gate'. Today we hear how Jesus calls himself 'the Good Shepherd'.

SIGN OF THE CROSS

LIGHT THE CANDLES

Light the candles and then sing the Candle Song together.

SORRY

Close your eyes and think about all the things which have happened over the past week. Have we always been as kind and thoughtful as we should have been? Have we done anything to make God feel sad or disappointed with us? If we are truly sorry in our hearts then God our Father will always forgive us. Listen carefully to the words of this reading. (*cf Psalm 25:11-16*)

God is full of kindness and love, and wants to show us all the path we must follow. He leads us with patience and understanding, and forgives us when we stray and lose our way. When we look to him for help, he rescues us from harm and helps us to try again, for he is full of love and forgiveness.

GLORIA

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

To welcome today's Gospel sing Acclamation 5:
We have come to hear you, Lord.

GOSPEL (*cf John 10:2-5, 9-11*)

One day, Jesus said to the crowds, 'A shepherd knows his sheep, and his sheep know him. When he calls their names, they know his voice and they follow him, one by one, through the gate of the sheepfold. The shepherd walks ahead of them showing them the way. He guides and protects them from danger and harm. The flock will not follow a stranger, instead they scatter and run away because they do not know his voice.'

Then Jesus said, 'I am the Good Shepherd, I know my own and my own know me. If anyone follows me I will lead them safely on their journey to the fullness of everlasting life.'

DISCUSSION

How did the sheep recognise their shepherd? – They knew the sound of his voice, and he was able to call each one of them by their name.

If you were a shepherd in charge of a flock what would you have to do to take care of it?

- make sure that the sheep have plenty to eat.
- make sure that none of them wander or get lost.
- protect them from thieves and wild animals.
- find them shelter from snow and bad weather.

In this country where do farmers keep their sheep? – In fields surrounded by hedges or fences to stop them from straying.

In the land where Jesus lived, do the shepherds have green fields with fences as we do in this country? – Because of the hot dry climate there is very little grass and the shepherd must lead his sheep from place to place to find enough food to eat. Often it is steep and hilly and the sheep must carefully follow their shepherd along the path that he shows them. They rely on him to find food and water for them, and to protect them from wild animals. (Show any pictures you can find of such terrain.)

Why did Jesus call himself the Good Shepherd?

Like the shepherd, Jesus will stay with us always. He knows all of us by name and calls us to follow him. He will lead us along the right path to heaven and will protect us from harm along the way. With him before us we can feel safe and secure because we can trust him to take care of all our needs.

ACTIVITY

Make a large picture of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, leading his flock along a path. Each child can write their name on a cut-out sheep, stick on a cotton wool fleece and add their sheep to the scene. Alternatively use this colouring picture with the children sticking cotton wool onto the sheep.

CREED

CLOSING PRAYER (*cf Psalm 23:1-4, 6*)

The Lord is my shepherd,
he gives me everything I need.
He leads me to lie down in green meadows
and to drink beside cool, deep pools.
He is my strength and protection
and guides me along the right path.
Even in times of darkness and trouble
I will not be afraid,
for he is always beside me
and will protect me from harm.
I know that his goodness and love
will stay with me all the days of my life.