

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
Fourth Sunday of Easter
May 8, 2022**

SCRIPTURES:

Acts 13:14, 43-52	Good news welcomed by those chosen for eternal life.
Revelation 7:9, 14-17	Great multitudes will worship God.
John 10:27-30	Jesus and the Father work together for the Church.

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

John:

The Gospel according to John proclaims, beyond any clear assertion of the other three, that Jesus existed before the world began; that he lives in this world as the presence and power of God; that he does the works of the Father on earth; that he himself is to be identified with the “Shepherd” of Israel who was God himself; that the sheep are safe in his care.

Jesus and the Father are one: in working (John 5:19-30), in teaching (John 7:17 & 8:28), in knowledge (John 8:55-58). We hear Jesus proclaim constantly that he is the “I AM.” (John 6:35, 8:12, 8:58, 10:7, 10:11, 11:25, 13:19, 14:6, 15-1). That is the sacred name of God, uttered to Moses on Mount Sinai. It is for claiming this name for himself that Jesus was accused before the Sanhedrin at his trial.

We belong to the flock that Christ has gathered as his own to be presented to the Father in the kingdom of God on the day of glory. We are privileged to be among his sheep. There is no better place for us to be.

But so many now, as then, are asking for “black and white” answers: “Are you the Messiah, or not?” “Look at the works I do,” Jesus says. “These are the works of God.” The Church says to the world today, “Look at the works we do; these are the works of Jesus Christ.”

Those who reject Jesus are not among the sheep of the Lord. Those who reject the Church are not among its members in faith and in love. Many walk away from the Church today because they expect and look for works which the Church cannot perform, no more than Jesus could perform the deeds that they expected of him.

John wrote for a community that included some who had been disciples of John the Baptist. And yet, there were still some of the Baptist’s disciples who had not come over to Jesus. The same community for whom John wrote also included many Samaritans. They yearned for the remainder of their community to also come to faith in Jesus Christ. The Gospel calls out to the disciples of John and to Samaritans to come to the community of Jesus Christ for whom John is writing.

There is need for us to know for sure whether God exists, whether Jesus is the Christ, whether our sins have been forgiven, whether Jesus has been raised from the dead, whether eternal life is real, and many other wonderings of the human mind. We live in an age when people do not take anything for granted and do not accept something as true just because someone said it was. The scientific mind wants proof. Ultimately, there are no strict scientific proofs for any of the above questions.

We have come to believe, through the supernatural gift of faith, that these things are true.

Either we have the gift of faith or we do not. It has to be based on an inner enlightenment given by the Holy Spirit. If a person has not had an inner experience of conversion motivated by the power of God, there is no real faith. We have come to believe because Jesus Christ said so because the Bible says so, because Church doctrine says so, because we have supernatural faith.

Acts:

Those who have been destined by God for “eternal life” are enrolled in the *Book of Life*. A “book in heaven,” in which the names of the elect have been inscribed has become one of the powerful images in the ministry of the catechumenate for the Church. We enroll their names here on earth in the Church as a sign that God has enrolled them in the Book of Life which is in heaven. In Islam, the *Koran* is primarily a “Book in Heaven” of which the Koran on earth is but an image of the real one in heaven. For us, the *Book of Life* stands as our image that God has chosen us as his own people. Our names, collectively, have been inscribed in God’s memory so that we might be remembered by him forever. Those whom God remembers have life with him forever. (Exodus 32:32, Psalm 69:28, Daniel 12:1, Luke 10:30, Philippians 4:3, Revelation 20:12-15).

Revelation:

We continue to hear from the Book of Revelation. The Easter season is the time for us to pay attention to the great revelation that God delivers to those who have been born again in faith and baptism. The white robes of the chosen ones are white because of the cleansing power of the blood of the Lamb. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God whose blood has cleansed us from sin and from every impurity. God is our shepherd; there is no more sorrow.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever experienced the care and guidance of Jesus as the Good Shepherd? What events do you recall in your own life that tell you that the Lord was really there for you when you needed God’s help and assistance? Do you have a sense that God truly loved you and took care of you tenderly and effectively? Can you testify to the fact that God does love us? What special touch do you think there is in the Christian belief that Jesus is the Good Shepherd and not just God the Father?

2. What caused the Jews to become so hostile to Paul and Barnabas at Antioch in Pisidia? What did they stand to lose if the message of Paul was true? What did they stand to gain? As Gentiles ourselves, what message have we heard and become so eager to believe? How come we believed? Do you know anyone who heard the message and turned away? Was there ever a time in your life when, having heard the message, you had turned away nevertheless?

3. Consider the white robes described in the Book of Revelation as the garb of those who stand before the throne of God. How do we relate the robes given at baptism to the white robes we will wear in the heavenly kingdom? Do you understand why the neophytes wear a white robe when they come to the Eucharist during the Easter season? Do you have the white garment that was given you at your baptism?

PRAYER

**“Father, eternal shepherd,
watch over the flock redeemed by the blood of Christ
and lead us to the promised land.
Grant this through Christ our Lord.”**

(From the **Sacramentary: Prayer after Communion** for the 4th Sunday of Easter)

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE:

The Church faces challenges about its authenticity all the time. Is it or is it not the Church of Jesus Christ? Is the Church *catholic* or is it just *Catholic*? “I believe in the holy catholic Church,” we say in the creeds. Have you ever noticed the lowercase “c” in the word “catholic”? If you go to a Sunday service in a Lutheran church or in an Episcopal church or in a Methodist church, you will hear them proclaim the same creed: “I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.”

The word we use in our title for the Church means “universal.” It is a Greek word which has been adopted in all the major languages of the world to describe and to identify the Church that was called into being by Jesus Christ when he sent the Holy Spirit upon the assembly of his disciples. All who have responded to the call of God to come together and to become the body of Christ in the world have become the Church, the catholic Church.

We who claim to have the fullness of the faith once delivered to the apostles and entrusted to them to be proclaimed in the whole world are catholic in our origin, in the means of salvation entrusted to us, and in the line of bishops who trace their ordinations back to the hands of the apostles.

To be catholic means to be universal in our mission, in the means for achieving that mission, and in our expansion to the far corners of the earth.

The Orthodox Churches identify themselves as orthodox, that is, possessing true teaching. They too claim to be catholic or universal. Of course, we claim to be orthodox also since we possess and proclaim true teaching from the Gospel.

To be catholic, the Church must draw all our resources from the Spirit of Jesus Christ who lives within the Church. We must be united in local churches which we call dioceses under the pastoral care of our bishop. Our bishop is joined to all the other bishops throughout the world who find their unity verified and protected by the Church of Rome at the head of which is our Holy Father, the Pope. If we break fellowship with the Church of Rome, if we separated ourselves in faith or in the sharing of sacraments from the Church which is presided over by the Bishop of Rome, then we have lost our catholicity.

We should be most careful to savor the full meaning of the word Catholic with which we identify ourselves. We should consider ourselves most privileged to live in the catholicity of faith and fellowship. Throughout the world, we can identify with one another as we proclaim the Gospel and celebrate the sacraments.

(See **The Catechism: #830-856**)

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