

Wednesday Morning Connection

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Sunday, April 29, 2007 Of Sheep and Flocks

The fourth Sunday of Easter is commonly known as Good Shepherd Sunday, since the Gospel reading in each cycle comes from John 10, the chapter in which Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd. This pastoral scene is also

reflected in the responsorial psalm in two of the three years, Psalm 23 in Year A and Psalm 100 this year, with its response, "We are his people, the sheep of his flock."

Following upon last Sunday's Gospel, in which Jesus entrusts the care of the flock to Peter, we are confronted with rural images with which many who hear these readings may be unfamiliar. While some may have actually touched a sheep at a county fair or a petting zoo, few of the members of our congregations have had any actual experience in animal husbandry. With 298 million people in the United States, sheep are outnumbered almost 50 to 1 (there's only around 6 million of them). Compare that to New Zealand, with 4 million people and almost 41 million sheep. You can bet that there will be a lot more resonance with the cultural aspects of the Gospel this weekend among the people of New Zealand or Australia, when they hear Jesus say, "My sheep hear my voice."

Urbanized society has been growing for thousands of years. In the United States, about 70% of the population live in urbanized areas with a population over 50,000, while another 10% live in what the Census Bureau describes as "urbanized clusters" between 2,500 and 50,000 people. As a people, we have become ever less attached to the land, even as our grocery stores abound with such a large variety of meats and fresh produce that it is almost embarrassing to contemplate the abundance of what lies before us when we walk through the store entrance.

Those of us who live in cities or in the suburbs can become more aware of the difficulties faced by farmers. The pastoral scene of the scriptures is not always the reality faced by those who produce the food that we consume so readily. Many who farm for a living are in serious trouble. And some of our food policies, while designed to help certain segments of the farm economy, end up hurting farmers. Other policies actually make it more difficult to distribute food to those who need it most.

In Sunday's Gospel Jesus says that he knows his sheep. How well do we know other members of the flock and the struggles that they may endure? It is out of concern for a part of the flock that the USCCB along with a number of other religious organizations have formed the Religious Working Group on the Farm Bill. They are advocating for reforms in the 2007 reauthorization of the U.S. Farm Bill that will prioritize policies that reduce hunger and poverty in the United States and around the world. You can read the principles that they endorsed and published this week at:

<http://usccb.org/comm/archives/2007/07-069.shtml>.

Advocating for the principles that the USCCB and other groups propose, is unlikely to be popular, since some of their positions could involve higher costs for the

This Sunday's Scripture Readings **4th Sunday of Easter**

Acts 13:14, 43-52

Revelation 7:9, 14b-17

John 10:27-30

food we eat. But concern for the flock cannot be reserved for some and not extended to others. The responsorial psalm this Sunday does not divide up the flock. It merely says, "WE are God's people." Urban or rural doesn't really matter to God. What does matter is that we care for one another.

Paul Michaels

PRAYER

Eternal Shepherd,
your flock seeks protection
in the outstretched arms of your Son
who died to set us free.
May the Lamb once slain and who now lives forever,
share his victory over death with all the baptized.
May we see the light of your glory,
and praise you with all the saints around your heavenly throne.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever an ever.
Amen.

NOTICES

CATHOLIC HOME MISSION APPEAL

Many dioceses will take up the collection for the Catholic Home Mission Appeal on the weekend of April 28-29. Information about the collection can be found at:

<http://www.usccb.org/hm/>.

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

The Holy Father's Message for the 44th annual World Day of Prayer for Vocations can be found at: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/vocations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20070210_xliv-vocations_en.html.

NDICE 2007

"Spirituality: The Foundation of Servant Leadership" is the theme of this year's national conference for the education of permanent deacons, July 22-25, at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. Information on the conference is at www.ndice.org.

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