

THE FOURTH WEEK OF EASTER

- Sunday** **The Fourth Sunday of Easter**
May 7 **How Our Shepherd Saves Us**
A reflection inspired by St. Irenaeus' Against Heresies
- Mon** **Monday of the Fourth Week of Easter**
8 **Why We Need a Shepherd**
A reflection developed from Clement of Alexandria's
The Teacher
- Tues** **Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Easter**
9 **Learning to Live Like Christ**
A reflection developed from Nicholas Cabasilas' Life in Christ
- Wed** **Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Easter**
10 **God's Design for His Sheep**
A reflection from St. Cyril of Jerusalem's
Commentary on Romans
- Thurs** **Memorial of the Holy Abbots of Cluny**
11 **Trust in God & Be Merciful**
A reflection taken from The Life of Odo of Cluny
- Fri** **Friday of the Fourth Week of Easter**
12 **Explaining Christ's Gifts**
A reflection from On Christian Perfection
by St. Gregory of Nyssa
- Sat** **Saturday of the Fourth Week of Easter**
13 **How Praising God Transforms Us**
A reflection developed from the Commentary on Revelation
by Rupert of Deutz

HOW OUR SHEPHERD SAVES US

A reflection inspired by St. Irenaeus' Against Heresies

The bread we break makes us shares in Christ's flesh and the wine we drink makes us sharers in his life. Human flesh and human life are both saved in and by Christ. There can be no blood without veins and flesh and the rest of our human substance. The Word of God actually became human flesh and blood and made the whole human substance his own. As God Christ lived a human life and showed us how to live a divine life even while being human. Christ calls us, as a shepherd calls sheep, to follow him in all he does and so become what he is. A shepherd has a flock and a good shepherd cares for all who belong to it by leading them to life in its fullness. One day we will be called to judgment and it will consist only in this: How well have we followed and imitated Christ, our shepherd? Our great task is to know and to imitate Christ our shepherd.

We are actually members of Christ and nourished by creation, which is God's gift to us. It is our God who causes the sun to rise and the rain to fall. God's creation is like a chalice and what we receive from it is human life divinized by God's Only Son. Christ's flesh becomes the nourishment of our flesh and Christ's blood the nourishment of our blood. We receive this each time we celebrate the Eucharist. How could anyone think that our created flesh and blood is incapable of receiving divine life since God has already accomplished this in Christ, and since Christ has called us to become as He is? Is he not the good Shepherd who has given his life for us, his sheep, so that we might share that life?

The Wisdom of God places so many things at our service. When bread and wine receive God's Word they become the Eucharist which is the body and blood of Christ. Christ's body contains all human weakness and Christ's blood contains all divine strength. That strength is communicated to Christ's weak, human body to make it strong and to show us that our weakness is no obstacle to the gift of everlasting life. The Word of God will raise us up to live with him forever.

Look upon Christ and see your own weakness. Look upon Christ and see divine strength. Look upon Christ and see your own mortality. Look upon Christ and see divine immortality. Look upon Christ and see the two perfectly united and know that nothing weak in you prevents your receiving strength and immortality. Look upon Christ and follow him in all he does so that you may be made able to follow him in becoming what he is. Don't be afraid but be filled with hope and the joy that hope can bring. It is in the realization of this hope that God has chosen to show power perfectly in our weakness.

WHY WE NEED A SHEPHERD

A reflection from Clement of Alexandria's The Teacher

In our illness we need a savior. In our wanderings we need a guide. In our blindness we need someone to show us the way. In our thirst we need a fountain of living water, one that permanently quenches thirst. We dead people need life. We sheep need a shepherd. We children need a teacher. The entire world needs Jesus! We need him in all these ways.

If we want to understand the deep wisdom of the Most Holy Shepherd and Teacher, the ruler of the universe and the Word of the Heavenly Father then we should ask why he calls himself “the shepherd of the sheep”.

Wisdom spoke at some length through the prophet Ezekiel on just this topic. He told them that precisely because their human shepherds had failed to do the task God had given them that Wisdom itself was going to care for those who need a shepherd because they have been injured and are sick and have strayed and can't find the pastures they need to have genuine life in its fullness.

These are what the Good Shepherd promises us. May the Lord indeed pasture us like sheep and fill us with the food that makes one righteous. May the Lord leads us to the Holy Mountain where he dwells, to the Perfect Church on High.

Think again of the promises we have been given: “I will be close to you”, as close as we are to our own clothing Ezekiel was shown. “I will save you” by clothing you in a robe of immortality and by anointing your injured body with holy oil. “You shall call on me and I will answer.” Even if we pass out of this life we will not fall into corruption but will be preserved and raised up to a new life.

Nothing forces our Lord to do this. It is what the Lord wishes to do. Our savior and teacher and shepherd is good a just. Thus he has come not to be served but to serve and help and care. He labored for our sake and even gave up his own life as a ransom for us. He went so far as to die for us. Will you trust him? Will you wait patiently upon him until he decides the time has come to fulfill all these promises? Will you bear your share in what may be needed to fill up the sufferings of the Church, Christ's Body? Will you accept him as not only benefactor but as friend? Will you make yourself a good sheep of the Good Shepherd's flock? Christ, the Good Shepherd, has shown us how to graze in God's pasture and find genuine nourishment. We have only to follow him, wherever He may lead us.

LEARNING TO LIVE LIKE CHRIST

A reflection developed from Nicholas Cabasilas' Life in Christ

To attain union with Christ we have to pass through everything the Savior passed through. He became what we are and we must become what he is. That means suffering what he suffered. Though by nature a shepherd, and the Good Shepherd, he became a sheep with us and suffering under bad shepherds who thought more of caring for themselves than for the sheep entrusted to them. Thus though Christ was free from sin and illness he accepted our flesh and nature and all the infirmities that go with it, especially those we inflict on one another and on those we should care for rather than hurt. So anyone who aspires to union with Christ must be prepared to share in all these unpleasant things as well as in his divinity and resurrection.

We associate ourselves with Christ's death and resurrection by our baptism, which we are told leads us to share in his death. We share in a royal anointing by our chrismation. We have communion with the flesh and blood he assumed when we eat the consecrated bread and drink the most holy cup. In this way we are united to him who for our sake became flesh, shared his own divinity with the flesh and died and rose again.

Why do we reverse the order, beginning where he ended and ending where he began? It is because the reason for his descent to earth was to make it possible for us to ascend to Heaven. We have to go by the same road as he did. Baptism is a birth, chrismation is a source of energy and activity and the bread of life and cup of the Eucharist are real food and drink. We can't accept nourishment until we are born. Chrism endows us with supernatural gifts but we have to have been reconciled before we can be numbered among Christ's friends and receive the appropriate graces.

This is why we are first washed, then anointed, and finally drink the blood reserved for those who are free from sin. Anointed, we were made fragrant with the sweet odor of Christ. It is in this way we are made ready to come to the Table of the Lord. Having eaten this food for the strong, for those who have put on Christ, we are able to bear the cross with him and so become fully like him. This is not burdensome. It is among the greatest graces and of blessings.

GOD'S DESIGN FOR HIS SHEEP

A reflection from Cyril of Jerusalem's Commentary on Romans

Christ declares that his coming was to fulfill a promise made to Israel. He says it thus: *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel."* Paul expands on this by saying that Christ became a servant to the circumcised in order to fulfill a promise made to the patriarchs by God the Heavenly Father and so charged him with this task. It was to lead Israel back to full obedience to God and so bring salvation to all non-Jews as well. The goal is that all peoples might learn to praise their Redeemer and Savior as Creator of the universe. Through Him all things were made.

In this way God's mercy is extended to everyone, Jews as well as non-Jews. So it can be seen that the mystery of the divine wisdom, as contained in Christ, has not failed in its benevolent purposes. God is saving those who had fallen away, and the whole world as well.

St. Paul throws additional light on this divine purpose and plan by noting that Christ became the servant of the circumcised to show God's fidelity. God had promised the patriarchs that he would bless their offspring and make them as numerous as the stars of heaven—make all into offspring of Abraham through Christ. Thus the Divine Word, who as God holds all creation in being and is the source of all its well-being, appeared in the flesh and became human. He came not to be served but to serve and to give his own life so as to ransom "the many" but making them children of the faith of Abraham.

So St. Paul says to all of us, *"Accept one another as Christ accepted you—for the glory of God"*. Accepting one another means being willing to share one another's thoughts and feelings, to bear one another's burdens and to *"preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"*. This is how God accepted us in Christ. St. John testifies that God so loved the world that he gave the Only Son for us. Christ has delivered us from death and redeemed us from sin.

Though many, we are one body and members of one another. We are united by Christ in the bonds of love. Christ has made Jew and non-Jew one, breaking down the barriers that divided us and taking away the need to observe the Law with its precepts and decrees in order to belong to God. This is why we should all be of one mind. If one member suffers some misfortune then all should share the misfortune. If one member is honored then all should rejoice. God would re-create the world as one people who are all his children and friends. If we are all so close to God how can we be far from one another? Christ leads us to one fold as the One Shepherd.

TRUST IN GOD & BE MERCIFUL

A reflection taken from The Life of St. Odo of Cluny

Odo often remarked that God always provided the means to feed the brethren and to give alms to the poor. Never did a poor person go away empty handed after seeking his help. Whenever he travelled he was always careful to ask if there was something for the poor, and if so he went his way happily and without hesitation. And because he gave to all who asked of him, by the power of God all things were supplied to him. He always had in mind the precept of Tobias, "See that you turn not your face away and give to all who ask of you".

The blind and the lame, he said, were going to be the doorkeepers of heaven and therefore no one ought to drive them away from his house. If it happened that one of us was put off by the effrontery of beggars Odo would rebuke them by saying to the poor person: "When this man comes to the gate of heaven pay him back in the way he has treated you!" He said this to terrify them and teach them to love charity.

One time when he was on a journey, the monk carrying the purse left his side as they approached a city and went ahead so that he would not have to give away the little money they had left. On entering the city Odo was surrounded by a crowd of poor people, but looking about and not seeing the monk with their money he guessed what had happened and so told all the poor people to come with him. Leaving the city he found the monk with the purse and ordered that what was in it be used to help the poor who had followed him. In fact, before their money was wholly exhausted, Odo met a priest who provided the monks with supplies enough to complete their journey.

Odo liked to tell this story: A young man engaged in literary studies was on his way to Morning Prayer one wintery day and came upon a poor person lying half naked in the porch of the church. Moved with compassion he gave the poor person his scapular, putting far from himself fear of the cold he would experience standing in prayer without its protection. When Lauds was finished he was frozen with cold and hurried to his cell to warm himself with the blanket from his bed. On the blanket he found a pound's weight of gold. It provided enough and more both for his own needs and those of the poor. This, he said, should teach us to trust in God and not fear to give whatever we have to the poor.

EXPLAINING CHRIST'S GIFTS

A reflection from On Christian Perfection by St. Gregory of Nyssa

No one shows a deeper knowledge of Christ than St. Paul or has surpassed him in exemplifying the salvation Christ brings us. He became the very image and likeness of our Master, transformed so that he no longer seemed to live his own life but Christ seemed to live in him. He became evidence of Christ's gifts to those who believe in him.

What is the meaning of Christ's name? We are told he is the power and wisdom of God, our peace, the light in which we see God, our sanctification and redemption. He is our paschal sacrifice and our high priest and, in sum, the perfect reflection of God's glory, our spiritual food and drink and the foundation of our faith. More he shows what these gifts mean practically? We are shown through another, who learned from Christ himself, and we must show others. This task is entrusted to each and all of us.

Christ is, as we are told, the eldest of many and when he went to the Father he left to us the task the Father had first given to him. Even if we are younger, and so still need to be further transformed, we have received a call which we cannot shirk. Each of the titles that displays the greatness and sublimity of Christ is to be reflected in us. We must bear witness to all this by our lives. In this way others will see what wonders God is working among us for our transformation and salvation.

Each of us has received a gift from the Heavenly Father through the Spirit poured out upon us. That gift enables us to exemplify for others some aspect of the wondrous new life we are given in Christ, God's Only Son and yet our brother. God is so full of perfection and goodness that it takes a huge multitude of people to mirror all that God is, and wants to share with us. It is part of our task to examine ourselves with care, but with gratitude and confidence, until we see more clearly what our gift is and how it can be shared with others. Do not be afraid, we are told. God is with you and will never desert you. So when we act we do so in the power of the Spirit and at the command of the Father in Heaven. Christ himself said that we would do works as great as he did, and even greater. All Christ's works were designed to draw people to the Father and so all of our must have that purpose too. Besides examining ourselves to understand our gift we must look carefully at the many ways God has given us to share that with others. Remember! Whatever you do should be done to show forth the wonder of the salvation Christ offers to us all. Act in the joy of sharing what no one else can and so drawing others to act on their gifts.

HOW PRAISING GOD TRANSFORMS US

A reflection from Rupert of Deutz Commentary on Revelation

“Let us sing to the Lord, great is his renown! Horse and rider he has cast into the sea!” This “Song of Moses”, recorded in the Book of Exodus, has a spiritual meaning that directs us to reflect on our baptism. In Revelation the hymn sung by the saints in heaven is described as the “Song of Moses”. It thus links two historical events by means of the spiritual reality contained in each. God leads us to spiritual freedom as he led Israel to a freedom that was first bodily and then spiritual. What was accomplished by the crossing of the sea is linked to what the Lamb of God accomplishes for us in leading us to a new life in the Spirit.

It is God’s Son into whose death we have been baptized and the exodus from Egypt to which the Song of Moses refers was begun by the slaying of a paschal lamb. In both cases God was leading his chosen ones to freedom and new life. In both cases the event which ushers us into this life is accompanied by song.

In John’s vision the saints sing “Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty; just and true are your ways!” These are not the very words of the Song of Moses but the substance of the songs sung is the same. Notice, further, that those who sing such songs are not content to sing the refrain just once but repeat it again and again. What the Israel sang is what we sing and what the saints in heaven sing. We are all contemplating the wonderful works of our God by singing out two supremely important facts—the power of God and God’s justice as Eternal King.

The second is surely the more significant. We fear and praise God because we witness God’s marvelous deeds, but when we discern the divine justice underlying all these deeds and uphold it in the face of every denial we gain the blessing of joy. We rejoice in the justice and rightness of all that our God does. We are learning to see God in all things. We are becoming like God because we have begun to see God as God truly is. We are bowing down in loving adoration of our God’s justice, worshipping him in truth, and rejoicing in all He does and is.

This is what those who stand in God’s presence do always. If we see all as a deed of God and as just and right, and if we do this all day as we look on the things God’s Providence has provided, then we see beauty and rightness and justice everywhere. This is an experience of joy coming from the recognition of beauty and rightness in all we see and do and take part in. It is a great blessing that is ours every day that we make singing God’s praise in our hearts our never ending theme.

