

Here's a text if you've only a minute ...

I have made you a light for the nations.

First Reading

We are his people, the sheep of his flock.

Psalm

The Lamb who is at the throne will be their shepherd.

Second Reading

'I give them eternal life; they will never be lost.'

Gospel

Almighty and ever-living God,
give us new strength
from the courage of Christ our Shepherd
and lead us to join the saints in heaven.

Old Opening Prayer

This week's texts if you'd like to reflect further:

Acts 13: 14, 43–52; Psalm 100 (101); Apocalypse 7: 9, 14b–17; John 10: 27–30

Adoration of the Lamb, Douce Apocalypse (c.1265–70)
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They were standing in front of the throne and in front of the Lamb

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ST BEUNO'S OUTREACH IN THE DIOCESE OF WREXHAM



Fourth Sunday of Easter
Year C, 8th May 2022

'I know them and they follow me.'

On this 'Good Shepherd Sunday', the Gospel verses are taken from the tenth chapter of St John. Here Jesus speaks of himself as the Good Shepherd, who brings life, love and protection to those within his flock.

In the **First Reading** we follow Paul and Barnabas to Antioch, where their message is rejected by the Jewish leaders. Undeterred, they turn their preaching to those termed pagans. To the joy of the disciples, these people readily hear and receive the message of eternal life offered by the Lord, fulfilling the commission given by Jesus himself.

The **Psalm** celebrates the joy, gladness and mercy that this eternal life promises to those who delight in being the Lord's people, the sheep of his flock.

The **Second Reading** recounts John's vision of heaven. Amid countless souls robed in the whitest of garments, we see Jesus as the Lamb, standing at the throne of God. We hear of the gifts of protection from hunger, thirst and sorrow which come to those who stand before God's throne.

Jesus, the shepherd himself, speaks in the **Gospel**, reminding us of the blessings of care and protection his sheep are promised — both now, and in eternal life, with Jesus and the Father.

This week, perhaps we can pray especially for those who, for whatever reason, may feel lost and without the protection of the shepherd they once knew. We also remember those who are searching for a flock in which to make their home.

We continue to pray for peace across the world, and especially for the people of Ukraine and eastern Europe.



Opening Prayer

Almighty ever-living God,
lead us to a share in the joys of heaven,
so that the humble flock may reach
where the brave Shepherd has gone before.

Second Reading **Apocalypse 7: 9, 14–17.**

I, John, saw a huge number, impossible to count, of people from every nation, race, tribe and language; they were standing in front of the throne and in front of the Lamb, dressed in white robes and holding palms in their hands. One of the elders said, ‘These are the people who have been through the great persecution, and because they have washed their robes white again in the blood of the Lamb, they now stand in front of God’s throne and serve him day and night in his sanctuary; and the One who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. They will never hunger or thirst again; neither the sun nor scorching wind will ever plague them, because the Lamb who is at the throne will be their shepherd and will lead them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away all tears from their eyes.’

I come to the place where I will pray today, and pause for a few moments to remind myself that the Lord is already here, patiently waiting for me, and is looking on me with such love. I take time to become still in whatever way works best for me.

I begin my prayer by slowly reading through the text a couple of times. I notice how this prophetic writing from the Apocalypse affects me. Does John’s vision of heaven appeal to me? Or perhaps it’s very different from how I imagine heaven?

If it helps, I might imagine myself in this heaven.

In the midst of the huge crowd of people, what do I hear ...?

A cacophony of voices, many different languages, all speaking at once ...?
Or perhaps just a deafening silence, as the people are overawed by the sight of the throne of God and Jesus, here in the guise of the sacrificial Lamb.
What do I notice as I look around me?

I may want to move through the crowds so that I get closer to God’s throne and to the Lamb. Am I comfortable with seeing Jesus like this, or do I find it hard to comprehend? I share my thoughts with the Lord, asking him to help me understand my reaction.

I listen to the words of the elder who describes the rewards of all those admitted to heaven. How do I respond to these promises of eternal life?

As I return to my own familiar setting, I ponder for a while what the Lord has shown me through this time of prayer.

When I am ready, I end slowly with whatever prayer I am drawn to offer.

Gospel **John 10: 27–30**

Jesus said:
‘The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice;
I know them and they follow me.
I give them eternal life;
they will never be lost and no one will ever steal them from me.
The Father who gave them to me is greater than anyone,
and no one can steal from the Father.
The Father and I are one.’

I take time to become still – perhaps by paying attention to my breathing. I don’t try to change it – I just focus on how the air flows in through my nose, and out through my mouth. Each breath in fills me with a sense of the Lord’s love and peace. With each breath out I let go of any cares or concerns I am carrying with me.

I read this short passage a number of times – slowly and deliberately, paying attention to each word, and pausing to allow them to sink in.

‘The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice.’

Where in my life am I truly listening to the voice of Jesus, my shepherd?
Are there things I know the Lord is trying to get me to listen to – but which, for whatever reason, I am resisting?

‘I know them and they follow me.’

How does it feel to recall how completely God knows me?

How closely do I really follow? Have I always followed or are there times when I have drifted away or fallen behind?

‘No one will ever steal them from me.’

Are there temptations that still sometimes attract me? Am I at times persuaded to take other paths, fall in with other flocks?

Very gently, and without any hint of self-judgement, I ponder where these risks might be for me. I might want to share my sorrow for times past with the Lord – or I may want to ask for the grace to better recognise and resist the temptations that might separate me from the Lord.

As I bring my time with the Lord to a close, I pray for the grace:

*To see him more clearly,
love him more dearly,
and follow him more nearly,
day by day by day.*