

Easter 4A 2020 SSP online

St. John 10:1-10

Today's Gospel in Saint John follows upon and is connected to the great story of Jesus's miraculous giving of sight to the man born blind. We heard that story in Lent, and it will help us to remember some things that happened to the man, abusive things done to him by the religious leaders, the Pharisees, who were enemies of Jesus:

- They refused to believe that his sight had been restored
- They called his parents and interrogated them
- When at last they couldn't deny that he was the blind beggar who was now seeing, they said Jesus had to be a sinner because he performed his miracle on the Sabbath
- When the man stood up for himself and for Jesus, they slandered him ("You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?!") and they threw him out of the synagogue

So the man was left alone with Jesus, whom he loved and believed.

NOW Jesus says those who were blind see; and those who see and say they see – they are now the blind ones.

SO Jesus in today's Gospel speaks of a coming re-ordering of things. A New Society is coming to birth among the Jewish people – led by Jesus, attached to his Person and Work.

In the OT Hebrew scriptures the people of God had often been likened to SHEEP; their leaders spoken of as SHEPHERDS. And the prophets spoke of this relationship critically. For example Ezekiel 34:2-4, 12 – "Ho, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the crippled you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not

sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them...So I will seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.”

Or Jeremiah 23:2-5 – “Thus says the Lord concerning the shepherds who care for my people: ‘You have scattered my flock and have driven them away. Behold I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the Lord. Then I will gather the remnant of my flock...I will set shepherds over them who will care for them... Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and execute justice and righteousness in the land....And this is the name by which he will be called: THE LORD IS OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

So comes Jesus onto the stage set by the prophets, the Messiah who shatters the conventional, secular, political and religious expectations with his immediate, personal, breathtaking, self-sacrificing love and healing grace. Blessings abound wherever he reigns: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. That is what we heard in those glorious Gospels of Saint John in Lent.

JESUS NOW TURNS TO THE GREAT OT TRADITION OF THE SHEEP AND THEIR SHEPHERD:

- The sheep are in a *flock*. *The Flock is the congregation of the people.*
- And there is a *sheepfold* for the flock. *The Fold is the church they are in, where they are safe and go in and out from and into the wider world.*
- So Jesus speaks of himself as the *Door to the Fold*,

- As Jesus is also the *Shepherd of the Flock* – the gatekeeper opens to him, and also to those *under-shepherds* who follow Jesus and whom Jesus calls to his mission and ministry as priests.
- The gatekeeper recognizes the voice of Jesus, and he recognizes that voice in Jesus's genuine under-shepherds, and opens to them
- Likewise, *the sheep know the voice of Jesus, as they also recognize that voice in what they hear from his genuine ministers/priests/pastors.*

The sheep will not follow the *stranger – the uncalled, self-willed* self-appointed minister/priest/pastor. These climb in another way (they can't go through the door because the gatekeeper won't recognize their voice) – they are thieves and destroyers who come to feed off the flock, to exploit the church, to serve themselves rather than Christ. Jesus calls them “hirelings” whose ministries are for sale.

True pastors are called by God. They endeavor to follow Jesus and minister in his name and after his example and under his authority. *Jesus is their Savior and Lord as well. They, like the other sheep, are themselves redeemed sinners. They comfort and care by means of the same care and comfort they themselves have received from Jesus.*

True pastors/priests/ministers proceed by the summons and sustaining power of a CALL, not from self-will.

Let us pray for our beloved Saint Stephen's. For the flock of its people and for the fold of its church. Jesus is the Shepherd of its flock. Jesus is the Door to its Fold. May the Lord bring us a Rector who speaks with Jesus's voice, who knows Jesus's love in his own life and opens his heart to share that love, who strives to follow Jesus and who serves in Jesus's name and thinks, speaks and act under Jesus's authority. Amen.