

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday of Easter

May 3, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Year A: 1 Peter 2:19–25; Psalm 23; John 10:1–10

In the rectory there is an important collection of service records dating back to the late 1870s. The oldest volumes are now too fragile to be handled. There are also bound copies of the parish's monthly newsletter *Ave*, that was replaced early in my tenure by the weekly *Angelus*. There was no mention in the May 1965 issue of *Ave* about the change Father Donald Garfield would be making to parish worship three months after becoming rector on February 1 of that year.

Perhaps a letter was sent to parishioners and friends, but of that I have found no record or reference. On Sunday, May 2, 1965, the congregation arrived for the Solemn Mass to find the removable brass rail at the high altar in place and a notice in the service bulletin that communion would henceforth always be offered at all Masses to the congregation.

Since the opening of the parish in December 1870, only the celebrant would receive communion at the Solemn Mass on Sunday morning—"Low Mass for communion, High Mass for worship" was a catch

phrase Among Anglo-Catholics back in the day. Fasting since midnight, following the contemporary practices of the Roman Catholic Church, became a hallmark of Anglo-Catholic tradition and devotion. On great feast days, before the liturgical reforms of the 1970s, the Solemn Mass of Maundy Thursday, for example, in a parish like ours, was celebrated at seven o'clock in the morning so that people could receive Communion fasting.

When Father Garfield became rector, Mass was said on Sundays without sermons but with communions at seven and eight o'clock at the high altar and at ten o'clock in the Lady Chapel. There was also a Sung Mass at nine o'clock with communions, primarily for families with children, at the St. Francis Altar, then in St. Joseph's Hall.

We know that Mass for worship without communion had spiritual power. The music and ceremonial were glorious and holy. This worship filled Anglo-Catholic churches like ours with large congregations well into the early 1960s.

Father Garfield's explanation of this change in the Sunday service bulletin began with these words, "Jesus said, 'I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd

giveth his life for the sheep.’ Christ Jesus gives us his life in every Mass . . . the Mass is therefore the time for the feeding of the faithful with the life of the risen Lord.” Father Garfield said of himself, “To be a good shepherd, I must feed the sheep.”

I am so very glad that the friars and the priests in residence we are free to live-stream our services. The bishops of the Church of England have prohibited any services like ours even in parishes and cathedrals where the clergy live on site as the priests and friars do here. The clergy of Canterbury Cathedral, for example, are video-taping services from their homes and gardens.

We know this pandemic has brought terrible suffering to the sick and dying and a terrible burden for families, friends, and to the professionals, the staff, and all involved in every level of the work of caring for them. We’ve learned that some mortuaries of our city are overwhelmed. It’s not irrational to be fearful of it. That said, I hope very much we will be able to re-open our church, with whatever appropriate protocols are recommended, before summer begins. The tragedy of unemployment and business bankruptcy is also underway. I fear this tragedy’s increase as well and the consequences it will have for all of us.

[I want to take just a moment to say thank you to everyone who has been able to continue to support St. Mary's and to some who are sending gifts for the first time. Your prayers and your gifts are needed and appreciated.]

Now, in all three years of the lectionary cycle, our gospels on this Fourth Sunday of Easter come from the tenth chapter of John. This year we hear the beginning of Jesus' response to a group of Pharisees who have objected to him healing a man, who was born blind, on a sabbath day.

The passage for next year picks up this same story with Jesus speaking to the same group. He continues, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."¹ Near the end of the passage he will say, "I lay down my life, that I may take it again . . . No one takes it from me . . . I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."²

In the third year, we hear the conclusion of the chapter. Time has gone by. Jesus is again in Jerusalem, this time for the feast of the dedication of the temple. Jesus will say, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know

¹ John 10:11

² John 10:17b-18b.

them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life . . . No one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.”³ The end of this chapter seems to be the conclusion of Jesus' public ministry. But it's not. The next story is the raising of Lazarus⁴ and for this he will lay down his life⁵ and he will take it up again because he and the Father are one.

I love it that in John, on the morning of resurrection, both Peter and the unnamed disciple whom Jesus loved do not see Jesus at the tomb. Mary Magdalene only recognizes him when he speaks her name. Thomas recognizes him by Jesus' words and his wounds. I believe Jesus knows my name and your name, the names of all people in all times and all places, for he is Lord of all.

May the doors of this sacred space be open again soon.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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³ John 10:27–30.

⁴ John 11:1–44.

⁵ John 11:45–57.