



DIOCESE OF HAMILTON

700 King Street West, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8P 1C7

Children's Liturgy of the Word

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Happy Good Shepherd Sunday! This special day allows us to focus on the powerful image of the Good Shepherd and connects to last Sunday's Gospel of the Eucharistic Meal, as the Shepherd lovingly feeds his flock. As we continue our journey through the Easter season, we remember our baptismal call to live out the life of the risen Christ in all our relationships.

Today's Gospel reminds us to always listen to the voice of Jesus the Good Shepherd, follow his lead, seek his protection, and be willing to give our lives for others, just as he did for us. It's a message that we can share with children.

The first reading from Acts tells about Saint Peter's arrest and testimony. Sadducees did not believe in an afterlife and were unhappy with the new Christians who preached about resurrection. Pharisees were upset with the apostles' claim that Jesus was the heir to Moses. Peter speaks fearlessly, proclaiming the power of Jesus. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Peter proclaims the truth. Warning: The statement in Acts that "Only Jesus has the power to save" is not a condemnation of those who are not Christian. In the gospel, Jesus says, "I have other sheep that are not in this sheep pen." By the power of the Holy Spirit, we fearlessly proclaim Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

Jesus uses the image of a good shepherd who cares for his sheep with great love and is even ready to give his life for them. He leads with a combination of tenderness and toughness, care and self-sacrifice. He is not detached from his people; instead, he is involved in a way that shows his love.

Jesus is the Lamb of God and the Good Shepherd. The Lamb of God refers to his role as a sacrifice that takes away sin, while the Good Shepherd represents his guidance and protection of his followers.

The relationship between Jesus and his followers is like that of a shepherd and his sheep, where recognizing and following his voice leads to safety and eternal life. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for us.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, gives his life for the sheep, his people, and the Church. He continues to shepherd his flock, even as they are cared for by human shepherds. The Church sees Christ in those who suffer and attempts to relieve their suffering. The Church honours work to alleviate human suffering.

- The church is a sheepfold, the flock of which God foretold, led by Christ, the Good Shepherd, who gave his life for his sheep (CCC #754).
- The desire for the unity of all Christians is a gift of Christ and a call of the Holy Spirit (CCC #820).

Objective

- † To help children identify Jesus as the Good Shepherd.
- † To see Jesus as a mystery we can never exhaust or contain.

Background

Acts 4:7-12

- † Peter and John were preaching to the people and proclaiming that in Jesus, there is the resurrection of the dead. This claim disturbed the authorities, who then had Peter and John arrested and taken into custody. Since it was evening, however, they waited until the next day to meet and interrogate them.
- † The following day, Peter and John were made to stand amid the leaders and defend their words. This event began formal opposition to their profession, and Jesus was the one they had all been waiting for. This opposition ultimately led them to proclaim the Good News to the Gentiles.
- † While the Jewish leaders were questioning them, Peter was so filled with the Holy Spirit that he didn't hesitate to name Jesus as the one in whose name the healing had taken place.
- † Peter quoted Psalm 17 when he told them that the stone they rejected (Jesus) had become the cornerstone.

John 10.11-18

- † This Sunday's Gospel is quite familiar. Like all Scripture readings, it is rich with meaning and is comforting and challenging. In this context, good means noble or ideal, and not just good at being a shepherd. It refers to the bond, the connection that is so strong that, unlike bad shepherds who steal or even eat some of the sheep, Jesus the Good Shepherd dies for his sheep.
- † This image of Jesus dying for his sheep was a common and often used theme in the early Church. The shepherd knows his sheep, and Jesus knows his followers. They are recognizable because they try to imitate the qualities of the good shepherd.
- † They watch out for each other, care for those in need, protect the vulnerable, and sometimes even offer their lives for others. They are noble.

- † They strive for the ideal of living a good Christian life.
- † Like the good shepherd, they do these things of their own will.
- † The reference to other sheep that do not belong to this fold can refer to future disciples.
- † By the time John finished recording his Gospel account, the community knew other Christian communities existed.
- † These communities traced their origin to Peter, who had the title of shepherd.

Leader's Reflection Questions

- † What name of the Lord do you call upon most often in prayer?
- † What does that tell you about the role of the Lord in your life?
- † Are you sometimes distracted by false leaders?
- † How do the media, money, and so on dangerously lead you away from the Good Shepherd?

The Liturgy

Procession from the main Church

After the opening prayer, when all are seated, the leaders come forward and stand facing the altar.

Priest: Go with your leaders and listen to God's Word about Jesus the Good Shepherd and how he cares for you. Listen to his voice to help you understand how to live. Go in peace to hear the Good News!

When most of the children have formed a procession, the leader with the book proceeds to the place of the celebration. The second leader usually walks behind the children. Upon arrival at the location of the celebration, the leader places the book on the prepared table.

Welcome.

The leaders assist the children to sit and prepare. Begin with the Sign of the Cross. Help the children think and connect their actions as they touch their foreheads, shoulders, and stomachs. The leader may say the following prayer in these or similar words.

Lord Jesus,

Bless us with open minds and hearts so that we will hear your message.

Amen.

Invite the children to listen to the readings.

First Reading

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and told the nation's leaders and the elders:

"You are questioning us today about a kind deed in which a crippled man was healed. But there is something we must tell you and everyone else in Israel. This man is standing here completely well because of the power of Jesus Christ from Nazareth.

"You put Jesus to death, but God raised him to life. He is the stone you thought worthless; now, he is the cornerstone. Only Jesus has the power to save! His name is the only one in all the world that can save anyone."

At the end of the reading, the Minister of the Word proclaims, "The word of the Lord."

The word of the Lord.

Children: Thanks be to God.

Gospel

The children stand for the Gospel. The leader proclaims it. All sign themselves on the forehead, lips and chest.

✠ A reading from the holy Gospel, according to Luke.

Children respond: Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus told his disciples: "I am the good shepherd, and the good shepherd gives up his life for his sheep. Hired workers are different from the shepherd. They don't own the sheep, and when they see a wolf coming, they run off and leave the sheep. Then, the wolf attacks and scatters the flock. Hired workers run away because they don't care about the sheep.

"I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep, and they know me. Just as the Father knows me, I know the Father, and I give up my life for my sheep.

"I have other sheep that are not in this sheep pen. I must bring them together, too, when they hear my voice. Then there will be one flock of sheep and one shepherd."

At the end of the Gospel, the Minister of the Word proclaims, "The Gospel of the Lord."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Children: Glory to you, O Lord.

Reflection

The leader may offer this reflection in these or similar words. Remember the amount of time available to return to the main assembly. The leader may wish to reduce the number of questions.

An excellent place to begin is the question:

What did you hear?

Allow each child to respond to hearing the Word of God in their own words. Then, begin a general discussion, building on these responses, using some prepared questions, like the following, to stimulate ideas.

Have you ever seen a sheep? What do you know about sheep?

Some animals can take care of themselves in a field. When sheep move from their pen to the field and back, they usually need someone to watch them. That person is called a shepherd.

The shepherd has an important job for his sheep. He finds good grass for them to eat. He leads them to clean water. He cleans their woollen coat, removing any thorns that might get caught in their coat. Most importantly, he protects them from anyone or any animal wanting to harm them. A good shepherd will do all of these things with love and gentleness. Jesus tells us he is a Good Shepherd.

Who are the sheep that belong to Jesus?

How does Jesus keep us safe?

Jesus gives us people who love us and care for us. Through them, Jesus gives us what we need and protects us. Jesus loves us so much that he will do everything he can to care for us. But Jesus also tells us that not everyone takes care of us like he does, like the hired worker who doesn't care about the sheep. Some people try to get us to do things that are not good for us or hurt others. These are the voices we shouldn't listen to. When we hear people telling us wrong things, things we shouldn't do, we can always ask Jesus the Good Shepherd to protect us.

For example, a friend tells you it's okay to do something your mother told you not to do.

Should you listen to him?

Or someone is laughing and talking when all of you are supposed to be listening to the teacher. Should you do the same thing?

We need to be ready to tell the difference between the voices that tell us to do what is good and those that ask us to do what is wrong or bad. Jesus tells us that he brings us together when we hear his voice. Let us pray so that one day, all people will listen to the voice of Jesus the Good Shepherd.

Following the reflection, the prayer leader invites everyone to stand to profess their faith.

Recite the Creed or use the sample below to ask the children to respond.

The Creed

Depending on the time, a simple profession of faith may be made (see below).

Leader: Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth?

All: We do believe.

Leader: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, who became our brother and gave his life for us?

All: We do believe.

Leader: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts and gives us everlasting life?

All: We do believe.

Leader: This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it.

Prayer of the Faithful

Leaders may begin the intercessions by announcing the needs they know. It may be necessary for the leader to repeat and paraphrase the petition and conclude it with the cue for the response: we pray. All respond to each petition by saying: Lord, hear our prayer. Sample intercessions are below.

Leader: With trust in our hearts, we bring our needs to the God who cares for us. Our response is: **R./**

Lector: For those who are hungry, we pray: **R./**

Lector: That people with power over others will be loving and show they care, we pray: **R./**

The leader may invite other intercessions from the children or add intercessions based on the Church's current needs, the world, or the local community.

Lector: For those who are left out of the things we do and those who have no friends, we pray: **R./**

Leader: O God, you are the Shepherd of your people; in you, we trust. Remember us and grant your blessing to those we pray to through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Ask the children to return to the main assembly. Ask them to return quietly and think about what they have heard and are now doing.

Be mindful of children having difficulty finding their families.