

Fearless in the Face of Fire

*A Missionary Commentary
on the Sunday Readings*

Sunday Readings

Acts 4:8-12
Psalm 118:1, 8-9, 21-23, 26, 28, 29
1 John 3:1-2
John 10:11-18

[USCCB link to the Readings](#)

In the southern agricultural regions of Chile, dotted with active volcanoes and large herds of cows and sheep, a good shepherd or cowherd would work hard in the weeks after an eruption of a nearby volcano—every three to six years, in the case of Mount Villarica, for example—to try to prevent their herds from eating the thick ash that would cover all the grazing fields for miles around. In many of the developing countries where the Church is young, dynamic, and growing, animal husbandry is a familiar hands-on experience, as well as a vibrant, rich symbol of good leadership, especially in dangerous times.

The “bad” shepherds of Israel’s pre-exilic past, written of in the Hebrew Bible, could easily remind the first Christians, six centuries later, of the Sanhedrin, who judged and punished the apostles of Jesus, events described in our first reading. The Sanhedrin rejected and eliminated Jesus before, and now persecute those continuing his mission, empowered by Jesus’ Resurrection and his gift of the Holy Spirit.

The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd who provides security and life to his sheep, feeding them in rich pastures and caring for the young and the strays, reminds the readers of John’s Gospel that Jesus did, indeed, literally lay down his life for his flock, rather than concern himself for his own safety or salary, when wolves or thieves appear—or, by extending the image, when volcanoes erupt, floods surge and droughts arrive.

May our Risen Lord continue to work wonders and to guide his flock today, through the shepherds after his own heart that are raised up, leaders at all levels who guide and help us live Christ’s mission today—standing with the poor, respecting our natural home—without fear or scattering, nourished by the One beloved of his Father, in whom we, too, are known, loved and sent forth by our Creator.

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Notes on the Sunday Readings

First Reading

Acts 4:8-12

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the apostles continue the mission of the resurrected Jesus, preaching the Good News and performing miraculous signs of healing. The apostles are thus becoming true shepherds to the faithful flock that God is restoring, while traditional authority figures are diminished.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 118:1, 8-9, 21-23, 26, 28, 29

The Lord answers our pleas. The stone that was rejected by the builders becomes the cornerstone. His mercy endures forever. Alleluia!

Second Reading

1 John 3:1-2

The inspired author who wrote this letter to his early Christian community believes that only the pure in heart may see God, which also assures us that we shall be like God, a transformation that has begun with our adoption as God's children, and which will culminate at Jesus' return.

Gospel

John 10:11-18

I am the Good Shepherd, Jesus tells us in today's Gospel reading. A "good" shepherd is a model, or an ideal shepherd, which echoes Psalm 23, as well as the prophecy of Ezekiel (34:1-31) who wrote of God's own good shepherding, and of a future good shepherding of a descendant of the celebrated King David. Jesus, as Son of God and Son of David, thus declares himself to be the Good Shepherd, the beloved, protective, and admired image of the best leaders of the revered past of his people, as well as of his own time and culture.

*Notes and commentary by Fr. Bob Mosher,
a member of the [Missionary Society of Saint Columban](https://uscatholicmission.org/donate).*

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