

The Deacon's Bench



by Deacon
Brian Conroy

4th Sunday of Easter: Life More Abundantly

Reflections
on Sacred
Scripture

Today is 'Good Shepherd Sunday' in which we hear the metaphor for Christ as the 'shepherd and guardian of our souls'. Agrarian themes of vineyards, wheatfields, sheepfolds and the like are somewhat alien to most of us living in urban 21st Century Los Angeles. While it is likely that we respond to these allegorical themes with a romantic or childhood understanding, the lived experience of daily life in the first century is entirely foreign to us. Consequently, the deeper meaning of the texts may elude us.

Today's singing of Psalm 23 is a case in point. While a popular favorite among the 150 'Songs of David', the 23rd Psalm uses quaint imagery to tell a deep truth: God loves and provides for us in all aspects of life. The expression, "I shall not want" is not saying I will never 'want' or desire anything, It means there will be no lack, I will not be without anything I need. Ever. Even in death.

The 23rd Psalm is used extensively at funerals. In fact, there are some faith traditions that use it exclusively at funerals. It speaks to the kind of need we have and the sort of provision God will make for us even beyond the grave. Green pastures. Still waters. The dark valley. These are symbols of phases of our lives and our death in which the Lord promises to be at our side, loving us, providing for our needs, bringing us home. Looking past the childhood image of a lamb across Jesus' shoulders we may come to see the profound depths of the human experience addressed in this word from scripture.

Jesus tells us today, "I have come that they may have life and life more abundantly." It is both this life we are living now, and it is the life of the world to come that Jesus addresses. As we listen to Jesus speaking directly to us in the scriptures, we then come forward together to receive his body and blood, his real, resurrected life, into our own bodies. This is not a symbol or an allegory but is the power of Christ's resurrection working in our lives. Eucharist is the fulfillment of the promise we hear today, "The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want."