

Reflection of the Gospel-Easter 4C
(John 10:27-30)

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Today's gospel is amazingly reassuring for those who truly hear the voice of Jesus. He "knows" them. These are the ones who "follow" him, those who live as he lived, caring for the "flock". There is a sense of mutuality in hearing and in being known. The inheritance of the "known" ones is "eternal" or never-ending life. In other words, they participate in God's way of being in the world. Just as the shepherds of the ancient world protected their flocks, so the followers of Jesus are secure in his "hand", secure in the "hand" of God, for Jesus and "the Father" are one. Later in John's gospel, Mary Magdalene will hear Jesus' voice and recognise him when he calls her by name. She is one whom Jesus' "knows". Her faithful following of Jesus will find expression in her presence at the foot of the cross and her visit to the empty tomb.

Sisters of the Good Shepherd, founded in post-revolution France to shepherd God's people, especially young women at risk, take their inspiration from the gospel image of Jesus as shepherd. They continue to shepherd God's people, including women who have been trafficked as sexual slaves. In recent years they have expanded their mission and, together with their associates and partners in ministry, have decided "to shepherd God's creation". Their foundress, Sr. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier, understood the ways of shepherds in mid-19th century rural France: "How, in fact, do good shepherds act? They forget themselves and often have to endure hunger and thirst. They are crushed by fatigue and difficulties—no matter! They are happy if their sheep do not suffer and if they find those that are lost. What trouble they take to lead their sheep to good pastures! In summer they seek out places where there is water and shade; in winter they lead them to where the cold is less biting and the grass more abundant. If they notice poisonous plants near the little lambs they hasten to pull them up. Day and night they are on guard against wolves—they never completely relax." The same respectful stance is needed as we seek to care for our threatened Earth community.

For the earliest readers of John's gospel, the term "good shepherd" was a contradiction in terms. Shepherds were known to trespass on the property of others in their search for feed. A positive image of the shepherd is nonetheless part of Israel's prophetic tradition. John's gospel evokes that tradition. It also evokes the figure of David, the shepherd boy who was destined to become king and to shepherd God's people. For biblical scholar Margaret Daly-Denton, the Israelite understanding of kingship is "shepherding done in the name of the true Shepherd of Israel (Ps. 80.1), the kind of care that reveals the divine 'care-fulness'" (*John: An Earth Bible Commentary*, T&T Clark, 2017, 144). Those who hear the voice of Jesus are called to that kind of care for one another and for our planetary home.