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Monday of the 4th Week of Easter

Date: Monday, May 12, 2025 | **Season:** Easter | **Year:** C
First Reading: Acts 11:1–18
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 42:2–3, 43:3–4 | **Response:** Psalm 42:3a
Gospel Acclamation: John 10:14
Gospel Reading: John 10:1–10
Preached at: the Chapel of the Most Holy Name, Kolvenbach House **in the** Archdiocese of Lusaka, Zambia**.**

In the stillness of the early morning, as the day breaks with soft light across the land, the voice of the Good Shepherd calls to us once again. “I am the gate,” Jesus declares in today’s Gospel. This is no ordinary gate—this is the entrance to life, to peace, to security. The sheepfold is not simply a physical enclosure but a spiritual haven, a place where we can find refuge and rest, where we are known by the Shepherd and invited to follow his voice.

But to understand the depth of this invitation, we must first consider the broader context of today’s readings. In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we hear a powerful story of the early Church grappling with the expanding reach of the Gospel. Peter, who had been hesitant at first, is now recounting the profound moment when he was called to baptize the Gentiles. This was a revolutionary act in a world deeply divided by religious and ethnic lines. The gift of the Holy Spirit is a divine confirmation that the Gospel is not confined to one group but is meant to embrace all nations, all peoples, without distinction. Peter’s words, “If God gave them the same gift he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?” remind us that the Church’s mission is one of inclusion, of reaching out, not of drawing borders or limiting the scope of God’s love.

And so, in a sense, Peter becomes the gatekeeper, yet he is also led by the Spirit into uncharted waters. The gate he opens is not one of exclusion, but of welcome. It is a gate that leads to life, not just for a select few but for all who hear the call of the Shepherd and respond.

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This theme of invitation, of God's expansive love, echoes in the Psalm today, which speaks to the longing of the soul: "As the deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God." The Psalmist, in a moment of yearning, expresses what many of us have felt in moments of desolation—an ache for something deeper, something beyond ourselves. This thirst for God is not abstract; it is real, and it is universal. It speaks to the deepest parts of our human condition, which is always searching, always longing for fulfillment. And just as the psalmist is drawn to the streams of water, so too are we drawn to the living water that only Jesus can offer. The invitation to enter the fold, to come to the gate, is not a call to passivity but a beckoning to respond, to seek and to follow.

As we shift our attention to the Gospel, we are invited to reflect on the image of the Good Shepherd, the one who knows his sheep and calls them by name. Jesus, in this parable, reveals the intimate relationship between the Shepherd and his flock. It is a relationship of trust, of mutual knowing. Jesus does not drive the sheep; he calls them. He leads them through the gate, guiding them to safety and security, to pastures of eternal life. This is no ordinary shepherd; this is the one who lays down his life for the sheep, offering himself as the ultimate sacrifice to ensure their well-being.

The voice of the Shepherd, the one who lays down his life, calls out to us still today. In our world, where voices of division and discord often drown out the call of peace, we must ask ourselves: Do we hear the Shepherd's voice amidst the noise? Are we willing to follow, even when it leads us into unknown territory? Following the Shepherd is not a passive act—it requires courage, faith, and an openness to change. In many ways, we are called to be shepherds ourselves, to lay down our lives for others, to guide the lost and the broken to the safety of the fold.

In the context of Catholic Social Teaching, today's readings also challenge us to consider how we are called to serve the poor, the marginalized, and those who are excluded from society's "folds." Just as Peter was called to expand the boundaries of the Church, we too are called to expand the boundaries of justice and love. The Good Shepherd's love is not limited to the comfortable or the powerful; it extends to all, especially the vulnerable. In Zambia, as in many parts of the world, the poor and the marginalized face systemic challenges that threat-

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en their dignity. The call of the Shepherd is a call to action, to work tirelessly for the dignity of every human person, to ensure that all have access to the life-giving waters of justice and peace.

As we reflect on the lives of the martyrs Saints Nereus and Achilleus, and Saint Pancras, a thread of steadfast commitment to the Gospel emerges. These Roman martyred saints, who laid down their lives for the sake of proclaiming Jesus, remind us of the cost of discipleship. Their lives, like that of the Good Shepherd, call us to live not for ourselves but for others, to be willing to suffer for the truth and to love sacrificially. In the face of persecution, they heard the voice of the Shepherd and followed, even to death. Their witness invites us to examine our own commitment to the Gospel.

So, as we enter into this week of the Easter season, let us ask ourselves: How are we responding to the voice of the Shepherd? Are we actively listening, or have we become distracted by the cares of the world? How are we expanding the fold to include those who are excluded, especially the poor and marginalized? And, in the spirit of the saints who have gone before us, are we willing to lay down our lives for others, following Jesus with courage and love?

In the week ahead, let us take time for reflection, asking:

- In what areas of my life is the Shepherd calling me to be more open, to welcome those who are different, or to listen more attentively?
- How can I serve the poor and marginalized in my community, following the example of Jesus's love and sacrifice?
- What personal sacrifices is the Shepherd inviting me to make for the good of others, and how can I live more fully in response to his call?

Let us listen closely to the voice of the Shepherd this week, and with renewed commitment, follow him wherever he leads, trusting that he will guide us to the fullness of life.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.

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