

**COMMENTARY ON READINGS FOR SUNDAY,
May 2, 2004 (Fourth Sunday of Easter)**

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The readings for this Sunday continue the view from two levels of what Christ's resurrection has brought; both levels must be read together. The first level is that of the early Church, expanding amidst incomprehension and strife. The second level is eschatological, that is, from the point of view of the End, God's consummation of history. God is working to bring all things toward that End.

Luke in Acts recounts how the early Church's difficulties with spreading the Gospel to the synagogue resulted in the taking of the Gospel to the non-Jews, that is, the Gentiles. The first reading reflects the bitterness experienced by both groups towards each other. Paul, one of the key players in this, would explain his views regarding the Jewish rejection of the Gospel in Rom 9-11: the Gospel would not have been taken to the Gentiles if it had not been rejected by most Jews, but in the End, all Israel will be saved, Rom 11:25-27.

The psalm rejoices that we are God's flock, and that he is our shepherd; "all the earth" should rejoice. The reading from the book of Revelation sees ahead to the eschatological future, after the "time of great tribulation;" such a trial was and is to be expected (many people on earth may have already felt that they have experienced it or something like it). See Mark 13:19; Dan 12:1-3; 2 Cor 1:8; Rom 2:9. The martyrs are singled out, wearing white and holding the palm branches of victory. They come from every 'race and nation'. All suffering will then be over, as the victorious Lamb (Jesus Christ) will shepherd them to springs of living water.

The gospel reading speaks of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, who keeps his sheep safe. See the relationship between Yahweh and the Davidic ("messianic") shepherd in Ezek 34 for a background to the Good Shepherd discourse in John 10.