

COMMENTARY ON READINGS FOR SUNDAY, MAY 7, 2006
(Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year B)
(Acts 4:8-12; Ps 118; 1 John 3:1-2; John 10:11-18)

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Jesus is the Savior which God's people awaited and hoped for in the "Old Testament." Many Jewish Scriptures spoke of the Messiah and what God would do through him in the messianic age of salvation, and the images presented at times were very different, so that there was room for discussion and varying interpretations (see, for example, Mark 8:27-30; Matt 20:20-23; Luke 24:18-27; John 7:40-52). A very common expectation was that the Messiah would liberate Israel from foreign (pagan, idolatrous) oppression (colonization). Many perceived Jesus in this manner (John 6:15; 12:12-19), and this is the reason that the Romans arrested and executed him (John 18:3, 12; 19:19-22).

But there were Scriptures that presented a different, more pacifistic picture of the Messiah. A very important one is Ezek 34, the great background for the Good Shepherd discourse in John 10. Along with Jer 23:1-8, it speaks of David as a righteous shepherd bringing salvation. The Good Shepherd, who stands for God, heals (Ezek 34:16), is a physician (Mark 2:17), a symbol of salvation (Mark 5:28 [Greek], 34). This is what Peter and the disciples are able to do in the first reading, in Jesus' name (Matt 10:1, 8, etc.).

But this reality was and is not clear to all, as the psalm and the second reading indicate. God's emissaries are often unrecognized or dismissed, if not attacked. See Mark 12:1-12; 1 Pet 2:4-8. It is a gift from God to be able to recognize Jesus, crucified and raised to life as Lord, the Son of God who enables us to be children of God (see Matt 5:43-48). Until we are truly transformed into the likeness of God (1 John 3:2), this world, who does not know God, will remain as it is, full of misery, violence, hatred, destruction and ignorance and intolerance.

The Good Shepherd gives his life for others, for all the sheep that must become one flock with one shepherd. The Good Shepherd is also the Servant (John 13:1-17). We must imitate him in this service to the end (John 13:1; Mark 10:41-45; Gal 6:2; Col 3:12-15).