

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

This is the fourth of eight consecutive weeks we read from Acts.

Perga = PER-guh
Antioch = AN-tee-ahk
Pisidia = pih-SID-ee-uh

Begin with energy to suggest the fiery preaching of the previous week that has brought a huge crowd to hear them again.

Apparently, Jews and non-Jews have gathered to hear them.

Now as then, jealousy can make us oppose even the Gospel. Speak more with sadness than indictment.

Paul is strong in his conviction that the Word must now be proclaimed to those willing to hear it, no matter their ethnicity.

Paul quotes Isaiah 49:6. Shift your tone for the quotation.

Share this news with joy.

LECTIONARY #51

READING I Acts 13:14, 43–52

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

Paul and Barnabas continued on from Perga and reached **Antioch in Pisidia**.

On the **sabbath** they **entered** the **synagogue** and **took** their seats. **Many Jews** and worshipers who were **converts to Judaism** followed **Paul** and **Barnabas**, who **spoke** to them and **urged** them to **remain faithful** to the **grace of God**.

On the **following sabbath** almost the **whole city** gathered to **hear** the **word** of the **Lord**.

When the **Jews** saw the **crowds**, they were **filled** with **jealousy** and with **violent abuse** **contradicted** what **Paul** said.

Both **Paul** and **Barnabas** spoke out **boldly** and said,

*"It was **necessary** that the **word of God** be **spoken** to you **first**, but since you **reject** it and **condemn** yourselves as **unworthy** of **eternal life**, we **now turn** to the **Gentiles**.*

For **so** the **Lord** has **commanded** us,

*I have made you a **light** to the **Gentiles**, that you may be an **instrument of salvation** to the **ends** of the **earth**."*

The **Gentiles** were **delighted** when they **heard** this and **glorified** the **word** of the **Lord**.

READING I

The visit of Paul and Barnabas to Antioch in Pisidia occurs early in Paul's first missionary journey through the Diaspora, the regions where Jews were dispersed beyond Israel. The activity described in today's reading will establish a pattern for Paul's ministry that continues into his second and third journeys. He begins by preaching on the Sabbath in the synagogue, where he speaks to this fellow Jews, centering his preaching on the good news of Jesus' Resurrection from the dead. When great crowds come to hear the word of the Lord

the following Sabbath, local Jewish leaders are filled with jealousy and express opposition to Jesus' teaching. Just as hostility did not stop Jesus from proclaiming the Kingdom of God, neither did it stop Paul and Barnabas from preaching. They continue to speak with prophetic boldness, telling their audiences that it was necessary that they, as Jews, should be the first to receive the good news.

The Jews' rejection of Paul's preaching, equivalent to rejecting God's word, is the catalyst for Paul to take the message to the Gentiles, who respond with delight, glo-

rifying the word of the Lord. This causes further jealousy and persecution by the Jewish leaders, who expel the two preachers from their territory. Rather than inhibiting Paul's mission, this results in his taking it to other cities, where he will again preach in the synagogues. He never rejects the Jewish people. Not inhibited by opposition, Paul and those who have come to believe are filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

READING II

Revelation, the last book in the New Testament, brings to fulfillment promises from the first book

Quicken your tempo to suggest the surging flood of opposition that begins to well up against Paul. Speak in the tone of the opponents.

Iconium = I-KOH-nee-uhm

Don't rush the last line. Despite opposition from their own people, they are filled with joy in the Spirit.

For meditation and context:

This is the third of six consecutive weeks we read from Revelation.

Remember you are proclaiming a vision that's meant to bring comfort. Read slowly and with reverence.

All of humanity is represented in God's throne room.

The "elder" asked John about those dressed in white and now provides his own answer.

of the Old Testament, Genesis. The great multitude described by John brings to mind the multitude of descendants promised to Abraham (Genesis 17:4; 22:17), now comprising both Jews and Gentiles from every nation, who stand before God's throne and before the Lamb. They have survived "the time of great distress" (*thlipsis*), referring to the end-time persecution of the faithful. Their white robes and palm branches signify purity and the saving victory that belongs to and comes from God.

John does not use the name of Jesus or Christ in this vision, but repeatedly refers

All who were destined for eternal life came to believe, and the word of the Lord continued to spread through the whole region.

The Jews, however, incited the women of prominence who were worshipers and the leading men of the city, stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their territory.

So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them, and went to Iconium.

The disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 100:1-2, 3, 5 (3c)

**R. We are his people, the sheep of his flock.
or R. Alleluia.**

Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands;
serve the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful song.

The LORD is good:
his kindness endures forever,
and his faithfulness, to all generations.

Know that the LORD is God;
he made us, his we are;
his people, the flock he tends.

READING II Revelation 7:9, 14b-17

A reading from the Book of Revelation

I, John, had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands.

Then one of the elders said to me, "These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; >>

to him as the Lamb. By using the image of the Lamb here and elsewhere in Revelation (twenty-nine times), John evokes both the sacrificial Passover lamb (Exodus 12), and the lamb led to the slaughter (Isaiah 53:7), with both images alluding to the death of Jesus. The multitudes whose robes have been washed in the blood of the Lamb have been faithful in persecution, some probably to the point of death. Now as they worship at the throne of God, they no longer experience any kind of suffering, but are sheltered and shepherded by the Lamb. They will know all the tender care prophesied by

Isaiah: no hunger or thirst, no scorching wind or sun (49:10). In a striking poetic reversal, the Lamb becomes the shepherd, leading the multitude to springs of life-giving water. The actions of God and the Lamb are comparable; in every way, God and the Lamb care for the faithful multitude.

GOSPEL

This Gospel passage is the finale and high point of the discourse in which Jesus identifies himself as the good shepherd. Active verbs convey the dynamic relationship between Jesus and his sheep: the sheep *hear* and *follow*;

Their reward is eternal joy in the shelter of the Lord.

This is Good News for all who sit before you. Let them know these assurances are also for them.

Anyone in your assembly longing for God's comfort should hear the hope embedded in this final line. Use eye contact with the assembly to be sure they hear it.

In a short reading, every word matters. This text is spoken entirely in the voice of Jesus.

Though originally spoken in response to opponents, in our liturgy the tone of the words might be softened and spoken with compassion and assurance. "No one . . ." requires strength and conviction.

Jesus' words are reassuring. Pause before the final line that asserts that he and the one who is "greater than all" are one!

they have **washed** their robes
and made them **white** in the **blood** of the **Lamb**.

"For **this reason** they stand before **God's throne**
and **worship** him **day** and **night** in his **temple**.

The one who **sits** on the **throne** will **shelter** them.

They will **not hunger** or **thirst** anymore,
nor will the **sun** or **any heat** strike them.

For the **Lamb** who is in the **center** of the **throne**
will **shepherd** them
and **lead** them to **springs** of **life-giving water**,
and **God** will **wipe away every tear** from their eyes."

GOSPEL John 10:27-30

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

Jesus said:

"My sheep hear my voice;

I know them, and they follow me.

I give them **eternal life**, and they shall **never perish**.

No one can take them out of **my hand**.

My **Father**, who has given them **to me**, is **greater than all**,
and **no one** can take them out of the **Father's hand**.

The **Father** and **I** are **one**."

Jesus *knows* and *gives*. Hearing is an essential component of faith and discipleship, a foundational imperative prayed every day in Judaism: "Hear, O Israel." Such hearing indicates attentiveness and obedience. Having heard the voice of the shepherd, the flock then follows him, a verb used throughout the Gospels to signify becoming a disciple.

For his part, Jesus knows his sheep. Far more than an intellectual comprehension, knowing includes understanding and profound intimacy. The gift that he gives to his sheep is eternal life; the life (*zoe*) that

Jesus bestows is not held off until a distant future, but is already given even now as a down payment for future fullness. As his sheep hear his voice, Jesus reveals to them the oneness he has with his Father. No one can snatch the sheep out of Jesus' hand, nor out of his Father's. Jesus uses a very strong verb here, *harpazo*, denoting seizing by force or snatching, which was used earlier in the discourse to describe the action of a wolf against the flock (10:12). Jesus and his Father protect their flock, sharing a common concern for their safety. Jesus concludes his discourse by announcing his

oneness with the Father. Later in John's Gospel, Jesus gives to those who hear his voice an ever-deepening revelation about the oneness he has with the Father (e.g., 10:30) and the oneness he desires for his sheep (17:22). E.P.