

# Christian "Mythology" of "The Good Shepherd"

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter – Year C

*Acts of the Apostles 13:14,43-52  
Psalm 100:1-2, 3, 5*

*Revelation 7:9, 14b-17  
John 10:27-30*

*In the ancient world, mythology was more than simply tall tales and legends. They were stories told about people and events that helped to deepen one's understanding of the world around them and one's place in it. This does not mean that all such people or events are fictitious.*

"Myth" is defined as "a traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief or natural phenomenon" or "a popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone" (Miriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th Edition).

The Scriptures are full of images that serve to help us understand more deeply the mysteries of the faith we profess. For example, the Church is described as a Bride (Eph 5:2533; Rev. 19:7-8), adorned in a garment of white, that symbolizes the good deeds of God's Holy People. While in reality we know that the Church is genderless, the image of the Bride helps to deepen our understanding and awe of the Church as the Bride of Christ, the People of God sharing a covenant relationship with our Savior. The image of Peter as fisherman, despite the fact that he abandoned that life to follow Christ, is nonetheless maintained to describe his role as the Great Fisherman, a fisher of souls. Indeed one of the earliest symbols of Christianity was not the



Cross, but the Fish.

Such images are "mythological" to our faith as Christians. This does not mean they are "false" or "untrue." Rather, the image lifts our understanding of a person or an event beyond the merely historical. In describing something "mythologically", we can more deeply understand its significance *theologically*. For example, we see our Blessed Mother as more than simply a young mother from Nazareth. As mother and disciple she we hail her as the first and

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## "The Good Shepherd"

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perfect follower of Her Son, Jesus Christ. She is the model for all Christians because of her complete adherence to the will of God. Therefore, Mary has been "mythologized" to be the very symbol of all followers of Christ, and therefore, a symbol of Holy Mother Church Herself. Because of this, when we celebrate Mary, we celebrate discipleship, the perfection of which she intercedes for us to continually grow.

Another image we celebrate in our Catholic tradition is Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd. Even Jesus makes use of this image to describe Himself in relation to his followers.

We are not distracted by the fact that, historically, Jesus was not a shepherd by profession. Jesus was a carpenter. However, we do not have very many parishes and Catholic institutions named for the Good Carpenter (maybe a construction company or two).

Rather, we understand Jesus as Good Shepherd in the "mythological" sense, which helps us to comprehend the theological

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understanding of Jesus' role in leading and guiding His followers, with all the attributes and accoutrements that accompany being a shepherd. As our Savior and Lord, Jesus, the carpenter from Nazareth, is the fulfillment of the words of Ezekiel, through whom God declared, "I myself will look after and tend my sheep. As a shepherd tends his flock...so will I tend my sheep" (Ezek 34:11-12). Jesus is the fulfillment of the Psalm that declares, "The Lord is my shepherd..." (Psalm 23:1). Through the eyes of faith, the words of Jesus and the tradition of the Church, we have "mythologized" the carpenter from Nazareth, and more deeply and profoundly understand his role in God's plan of salvation as our true and Good Shepherd.

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