

**Reflection of the Gospel-Easter 4C**  
**(John 10:27-30)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

One of the blessings of my life has been the opportunity to work in several different cultural contexts. My ministry has taken me twice to the Good Shepherd Centre in Angers in France. The Sisters of the Good Shepherd were founded in post-revolution France to shepherd God's people, especially young women at risk. Taking their inspiration from the gospel image of the Good Shepherd, they continue to shepherd God's people, including women who have been trafficked as sexual slaves. In recent years they have expanded their mission and, together with their associates and partners in ministry, have decided "to shepherd God's creation".

Good Shepherd foundress, Sr. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier, understood the ways of shepherds in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century rural France: "How, in fact, do good shepherds act? They forget themselves and often have to endure hunger and thirst. They are crushed by fatigue and difficulties – no matter! They are happy if their sheep do not suffer and if they find those that are lost. What trouble they take to lead their sheep to good pastures! In summer they seek out places where there is water and shade; in winter they lead them to where the cold is less biting and the grass more abundant. If they notice poisonous plants near the little lambs they hasten to pull them up. Day and night they are on guard against wolves – they never completely relax." The same respectful stance is needed as we seek, like the Good Shepherd family, to care for our threatened Earth community.

Strangely enough, for the earliest readers of John's gospel, the term "good shepherd" was a contradiction in terms. Most shepherds were known to trespass on the property of others in their search for feed. They thus broke the Jewish purity laws and were considered unclean. A positive image of the shepherd is nonetheless part of Israel's prophetic tradition. It is that tradition that the gospel evokes. Today's gospel has Jesus say: "The sheep that belong to me hear my voice...." Later in John's gospel, Mary Magdalene will hear Jesus' voice and recognise him when he calls her by name. She is one of Jesus' "own", one who knows his voice. Her faithful following of Jesus will find expression in her presence at the foot of the cross and her visit to the empty tomb.

Eternal life and the oneness of Jesus with God are also features of today's gospel. Jesus announces: "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly." Eternal life is never-ending life. It is the inheritance of those who hear his voice. To hear is to follow through with action. That is the way of those inspired by Jesus, the Good Shepherd. It is the way of the Good Shepherd family and of all who hear the voice of the Shepherd.