

**Reflection on the Gospel- Easter 4A**  
**(John 10:1-10)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

My brother and sister-in-law were farmers who woke up one morning to find that all their sheep had disappeared. It seems that some enterprising thief or thieves had managed to load their sheep on to transports and move them interstate in the few hours between dusk and dawn. The unwelcome visitors had actually come in by the front gate, crossed the cattle pit, worked swiftly, and driven out again. In ancient Palestine, the flock would have been much smaller, the entrance would have been guarded and comings and goings would have been monitored closely by the gatekeeper. A thief would have had to scale the wall of the small enclosure and watch carefully for a chance to get away with a few of the sheep.

In John 10, Jesus presents a parabolic image about sheep and shepherds. His hearers fail to understand. This is hardly surprising because of the unusual mixing of metaphors, but also because they are hostile and choose not to understand. He proceeds to offer explanations of various aspects of the image he has created, two of which are included in today's reading. In the image, Jesus is both the gate to the sheepfold and the shepherd of the flock. He contrasts the access he provides as "the gate" with the unauthorized access gained through others "who have come before" him, namely the religious authorities featured in the previous chapter. They are unauthorized shepherds who gain access to the sheepfold on false pretences and lead God's flock into pastures that fail to satisfy.

There are echoes of the Psalms of Israel in this reading. In Psalm 23, God is the shepherd of Israel who leads the people into nourishing pastures and restores life to the depths of their *nephesh* or being. *Nephesh* is the word used in Genesis 2 for the life that God breathes into all beings. God leads the people in the way of justice or righteousness. Psalm 118 sings of God's gate through which the just or righteous will enter and give thanks. As the gate to the little sheepfold, Jesus offers the way to and from abundant life. As the shepherd, he monitors the movement of the sheep so that they are not tempted to stray along the paths of unrighteousness and destruction.

As usual, the gospel text is multi-layered. The images pulsate with life and energy. They invite to vigilance on the one hand and gratitude on the other. They offer yet another way of thinking about Easter. At this time of Earth's distress, we might spare a thought for our farmers who, often in the face of adversity, struggle to care for their animals, to ensure the sustainability of the land entrusted to them, and to provide the produce we so often take for granted.