

“Life, Abundant!”

John 10:1-10

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. John 10:10

Let your word come fresh and alive, as you speak through the Scriptures, meditated and interpreted for us today. Amen.

It's about life – life abundant, this is the message that Jesus wanted to convey. The Psalm, the Epistle and the Gospel readings on this 4th Sunday of Easter reminds us of the image of God as a Shepherd. The most popular line that many Christians are familiar with is that verse in Psalm 23 stating that *“The Lord is my shepherd!”* Jesus himself used the metaphor of the relationship between the Shepherd and the sheep in our gospel reading.

This section is part of Jesus' discussion on the issue about healing the man born blind. The Pharisees were not happy about the whole incident and they tried their best to discredit Jesus. Our gospel reading is part of Jesus response. He spoke to them in a figure of speech, using the image of the Shepherd and the gate to which the sheep enters. He spoke about the sheep listening to the voice of the Shepherd and following wherever the shepherd leads. This is in sharp contrast with the thief and the bandit. At the end Jesus made his point crystal clear when he said: *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*

The image of the shepherd is far removed from our daily experience. A lot of people who grew up in cities could only imagine what shepherds do. For some the image of a shepherd comes only from Sunday school pictures produced long time ago that looks clean and cute. I remember a picture of Jesus wearing a white and red robe carrying a sheep on his shoulder to illustrate the parable of the shepherd seeking the lost sheep.

The other picture was the same image but this time, Jesus carried a big stick or staff with a flock of sheep around him in a manicured green and grassy field, a very serene and subdued picture. I don't

think that's the image that comes to mind with those who live in the farms when you speak to them about shepherds.

During Biblical times, shepherding was not a job that many people would love to do. You will work long hours away from the towns and the center of entertainment. You will be on the hills and valleys just looking and gazing at places where your families and friends are. You will be exposed to danger and threat from wild animals and thieves. Shepherding is a lonely, dirty and smelly job – in fact shepherds were marginalized in society. I suspect that many would dream to be owners of the sheep rather than work as shepherds on the field.

But people also knew that a true shepherd is a symbol of love, courage, patience and sacrifice. It is no wonder that shepherds watching their flock by night were the first to hear the good news from the angels about the birth of the Savior Jesus Christ. The shepherd's heart and character is a powerful and moving metaphor of God. Just as the shepherd is concerned for the well-being of the flock, so it is with God. God desires life, life at its best, life that is abundant. This is the reason why Jesus came and this he wants us to remember.

Jesus did not explain further what this life abundant is all about. Following the metaphor of the Shepherd and the sheep, what is implied is that to experience life abundant is to follow where the Shepherd leads. Peter writing to the church said that Christ "... *leaves you an example, so that you should follow in his steps,*" (1 Peter 2:21) Jesus whom he refers to as the "shepherd and the guardian of our souls."

There was that incident recorded in the gospel when a rich ruler approached Jesus and asked him the question, "*Good teacher, what must I do to have eternal life?*" (Luke 18:18-25). This man was searching for that life abundant and it looks like he had all that we can imagine that a person could have in his days. The scenario could be two way; he wanted confirmation from Jesus that what he had constitute life abundant or he knew that there is something missing in his life to reach his goal. Surprisingly, Jesus called him to divest his wealth and challenge him with this never ending

invitation – ‘*follow me!*’

A lot of people associate life abundant to happiness but this is not the Biblical perspective. Bible speaks of joy, the inner quality of the heart rather than happiness which comes as a result of what happens around us. You will have plenty of advice on how to be happy, a lot of TV hosts and self-help books will give you tips on – how to be happy with your life, how to be happy with yourself or with your spouse or with your work, how to be happy with your dog, etc.

C. S. Lewis in his book *God in the Dock* has a chapter “We Have No Right to Be Happy.” He warns that “the good news of the gospel is more than a promise that we will be happy. In fact, no such promise is made, and the continual pursuit of happiness as an ultimate goal in life will result in an unnatural affection for something that will eventually sweep us away.” The goal is not to be happy but to follow Jesus and it means utmost joy that is not dependent on the circumstances that surrounds our life.

Knowing the distinction between happiness and joy, it is interesting to note on how people measure happiness. Just recently, a research was done on “what kind of job do happiest people in the U.S. have? This is a study conducted by University of Chicago.

Tom W. Smith, director of the General Social Survey at the National Opinion Research Center at UC, elaborates: “Happiness is determined by how much satisfaction you get from all domains of life—personal, the community you live in, and work is an important domain, so it’s one of the major components of overall happiness.” The top ten in the list are: clergy, firefighters, transportation ticket and reservation agents, architects, special education teachers, actors and directors, science technicians, mechanical and repairing occupations, industrial engineers, airline pilots and navigators.

The study says the occupations where people report being happy overall, not just in terms of job satisfaction, involve helping others, technical and scientific expertise, or creativity.

(<http://jobs.aol.com/article>)

One of the things I look forward to in ABC Nightly News with Charles Gibson is that section when he features the Person of the Week. These are inspiring stories that winds up the news which most often are depressing. Last Friday, a creative 9th Grade English teacher from Circleville, Ohio was featured. Pat Colangeli gave a unique assignment to her class. She gave each student \$10 with the instruction to give this to someone in need. They can keep it if in her words “they are the best charity” or they can pool it together – the only condition is that they will write an essay about their experience. Fire victims, the humane society, a food pantry among others were helped, in fact, even though their town was not in good shape economically but this gesture encourage others to give. The \$200 investment now grew into \$6,300. But the greatest gift Pat Colangeli gave was not the \$200 but the way she opened not only the eyes but the heart of her students. I am sure this is a lesson that they will carry for the rest of their lives. Tears of joy flow in her eyes when she was interviewed.

Every good teacher knew this joy when they made a difference in the lives of their students. This is the joy that cannot be compensated. To me this is one of the reminders that life at its best and life in its fullness happens still, when we think out of the box and be a person for others.

I love the story about a group of alumni who were highly established in their careers, one day they got together to visit their old university professor. Conversation soon turned into complaints about stress in work and life.

_Offering his guests coffee, the professor went to the kitchen and returned with a large pot of coffee and an assortment of cups — porcelain, plastic, glass, crystal, some plain looking, some expensive, some exquisite — telling them to help themselves to the coffee.

_When all the students had a cup of coffee in hand, the professor said: “If you noticed, all the nice-looking, expensive cups were taken up, leaving behind the plain and cheap ones. While it is normal for you to want only the best for yourselves, that is the source of your problems and stress. Be assured that the cup itself

adds no quality to the coffee. In most cases it is just more expensive and in some cases even hides what we drink.

What all of you really wanted was coffee, not the cup, but you consciously went for the best cups. And then you began eyeing each other's cups.

_Now consider this: Life is the coffee; the jobs, money and position in society are the cups. They are just tools to hold and contain Life, and the type of cup we have does not define, nor change the quality of the Life we live.

Sometimes, by concentrating only on the cup, we fail to enjoy the coffee God has provided us." God brews the coffee, not the cups. Enjoy your coffee!

_“The happiest people don't have the best of everything. They just make the best of everything.” Live simply. Love generously. Care deeply. Speak kindly. Leave the rest to God.” (Homiletics on line)

The call and challenge to follow Jesus comes in different forms. We who received the sacrament of baptism and walk with Christ wrestled with this day by day. We constantly ask ourselves – am I following God's way in every decision that I make? Am I listening to the voice of the Shepherd or am I listening to other voices that confirm what I had already planned in my heart? And we know how hard it is – for many times we are pulled to choose between our good intentions and God's desire for our lives. This is the most difficult choice, it is always easy to choose between what is blatantly evil and what is clearly good. But choosing between our way with all the good reasons on our side and God's way with a matching uncertainty is an act of faith.

The call and the challenge also vary in our life time. God may call us to walk on this path today and change it tomorrow. This is true even in our life as a congregation. New conditions may emerge tomorrow that calls for a different response. But the shepherds call is constant – follow me for I know where the green pastures and where the living streams are.

We follow and walk with the risen Christ who leads us like a Good Shepherd. We walk with Jesus, whatever the cost may be, because

he assured us with these words: *I came that you (they) may have life, and have it abundantly... more abundantly!*

April 13, 2008

4th Sunday of Easter

April 13, 2008 – 1:30 P.M.

Preacher: Rev. Reuben D. Cedino
Sermon: "*Life, Abundant!*"

SCRIPTURE READING:

Epistle: 1 Peter 2: 19-25

Gospel: John 10:1-10

Anthem: "Easter Alleluia"

Fil-Am UCC Choir

Liturgist: Ms. Julia Cada-Noya

Pianist: Mr. Noel Rivera III

Organist and Choral Director: Ms. Rachel A. Dadap

Mr. Michael A. Dadap, *Elder-in-Charge*

Ms. Lily Manalo, *Steward-in-Charge*

Ms. Jennifer V. Pal, *Trustee-in-Charge*

Dr. & Mrs. Romeo & Prossy Dagdayan, *Ushers*

Ms. Debbie B. Villanueva, *Floral Offering*