

4th Sunday Easter Year "C" *You are the protector, You are our custodian and defender*  
April 20-21, 2013

Readings: Acts 5:27-32,40-41; Revelation 7:14-17; John 10:27-30

It has been a grueling week in our nation, and I suspect that I am not alone in feeling somewhat exhausted, emotionally and spiritually. And imagine the feelings of those in Boston or in West, Texas. Two tragic events shocked us— one apparently accidental, and the other clearly an act of hatred and terror. On Good Shepherd Sunday, it is very easy to feel as though we are without a shepherd guiding us, to feel as if we are on our own, unprotected, and extremely vulnerable. Of course, even the best shepherd in ancient times could not prevent every wolf from attacking.

In the Book of Revelation, we heard that it is the Lamb who will shepherd the people, leading them to springs of life-giving water. He will also wipe away the tears from their eyes. When we put our trust in the Lamb, we will follow his way. Both the Shepherd and the Lamb are images for Jesus Christ, each in its own way. It is most especially in times of critical difficulties that we must turn towards the Good Shepherd for guidance. For one day we will stand before God's Throne, and we will be called upon to make an accounting of our life.

Did we follow Jesus, the Good Shepherd? Did we trust that he would guide us, and trust his Word, even when it challenged us, in fact especially when it challenged us? Or did we doubt his presence? I think of the account of Jesus in the boat, when after an exhausting day, he was awakened by the disciples during a storm. "Teacher, do you not care that we are drowning?" He answers, "Why are you afraid?" and "Do you still have no faith?" After all, a Good Shepherd protects his sheep. This is a fact that every parent knows first hand, for they provide protective care to their children. We entrust our public safety to local, state and federal law enforcement, and rarely think about it until emergencies happen.

The chief function of the federal government is to protect the citizenry. Our military and our law enforcement officials often risk their lives to protect us, in many cases on a daily and nightly basis. We do not notice them, and yet they are watching over us. We must never take them for granted, and sadly it takes tragedies sometimes to remind us of this.

There are lingering questions that will take significant time to answer. Most of them begin with the word “Why?” and we cannot be afraid to ask them. At the same time, we mustn’t despair for lack of answers, even as we struggle. I will not pretend to offer any easy answers to the reality of terrorism, how or why two young men, having been educated in this country, then became radicalized, senselessly taking innocent lives. Nor would I try to imagine the sadness of the families of the victims, those that died and those who were severely injured.

But I do believe that we must turn to our Lord and beg from Him the graces to remain convinced that good triumphs over evil, and can never be overcome by it. The perpetrators of the Boston attack did not and will not succeed to make us fearful, unless we give them the power to do so. At an interfaith Memorial Service on April 18<sup>th</sup>, Cardinal Sean O’Malley noted that this tragic event “shakes us out of our complacency and indifference and calls us to focus on the task of building a civilization that is based on love, justice, truth and service.”<sup>1</sup>

But evil did not triumph. The exuberant cheers in the streets Friday night, the roars of the crowd at the first Red Sox home game on Saturday- these all served as a release of the days of pent up anger, fear and stress of the investigation and manhunt that ensued. We all breathed a sigh of relief and cheered right along with the Bostonians.

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<sup>1</sup> Cardinal Sean O’Malley, 18 April 2013, Interreligious Prayer memorial, Holy Cross Cathedral, Boston.

This entire week has been “a challenge and an opportunity for us to work together with a renewed spirit of determination and solidarity and with the firm conviction that love is stronger than death.”<sup>2</sup> We must not shrink from asking very difficult questions about security, freedom, even as we try to foster greater understanding of those who are different. The horrific trial of the abortionist Dr. Kermit Gosnell that is unfolding in Philadelphia reminds us that other heinous and unspeakable things are being done in our midst. If anyone today denies the reality of evil, I humbly respond that they are denying the reality of reality.

I close with this prayer written by St. Francis of Assisi on Mount La Verna in September 1224, when he received the stigmata. The parchment with the autograph of Francis is conserved as a relic in the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi:

*You are holy Lord God Who does wonderful things.[]  
You are strong. You are great. You are the most high.[]  
You are the almighty king. You holy Father,[]  
King of heaven and earth.[]  
You are three and one, the Lord God of gods;[]  
You are the good, all good, the highest good,[] Lord God living and true.[]  
You are love, charity; You are wisdom, You are humility,[]  
You are patience, You are beauty, You are meekness,[]  
You are security, You are rest,[]  
You are gladness and joy, You are our hope, You are justice,[]  
You are moderation, You are all our riches to sufficiency.[]  
You are beauty, You are meekness,[]  
You are the protector, You are our custodian and defender,[]  
You are strength, You are refreshment. You are our hope,[]  
You are our faith, You are our charity,[]  
You are all our sweetness, You are our eternal life:  
[] Great and wonderful Lord, Almighty God, Merciful Savior.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Cardinal Sean O'Malley, 18 April 2013, Interreligious Prayer memorial, Holy Cross Cathedral, Boston.

<sup>3</sup> Francis of Assisi, “The Praises of God,” Mount LaVerna, September A.D. 1224