



## Good Shepherd Sunday Reflecting at home



The Fourth Sunday of the Easter Season is lovingly referred to as "Good Shepherd Sunday". For children who have attended an atrium, this parable will be familiar. However, to honour the child's age and stage of development, the young child receives just the following passages:

*"The sheep hear his voice as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So, there will be one flock, one shepherd."*

**(NRSV John 10: 3(b) - 5, 10(b) - 11, 14 - 16).**

These passages focus on the relationship between the Good Shepherd and his sheep, and as such, meet the young child's need for unconditional love, care and protection.

### Reading and Reflecting on this parable with your children

During family prayer, you could read this parable each day for the week.

- Gather in your prayer space and light candles
- Invite everyone to close their eyes and silently bring Jesus to mind
- Read the words of the parable, preferably from your bible
- Reflect together with some of the following suggestions. You might like to focus on just a few points each day.

Reflecting is a time for listening with your children and exploring together what God is trying to reveal to you through the scripture. Listen to what your child tells you. They may have insights you have not yet thought about.

The following points of reflection are taken from [The Good Shepherd and the Child a Joyful Journey](#) Pages 41-42. This book is wonderful for supporting parents in their understanding of the young child's relationship with God.

"With the initial presentation of the Good Shepherd parable these questions would include:

- What makes him so 'good'? what is so special about him? Young children are particularly struck by the fact that he calls each sheep by name, indicating that he knows them very well; each one is special.)
- What does he do for/with his sheep? And what do his sheep do?
- Are these sheep fortunate to have such a Good Shepherd? Do you think they are happy?
- Who could these sheep be who are so known and loved by the Good Shepherd?

Perhaps the hardest question for us as adults to leave open-ended, not to push for a right answer, is the last one. One might think it is crucial that the children "get it" immediately that they are the sheep. How can they receive the good news in this parable if they don't realise they are the sheep? But there are two very important reasons to resist the urge to push for an answer:



- Jesus used the parable method not only because it honours the Mystery (God and God's Kingdom), but also because it honours the human partner in the covenant; the parable method honours the importance of the "joy of discovery" for the listener.
- Young children might not yet have the capacity to consciously realise they are the sheep, but they receive the Good News of this parable as if they were the sheep (which numerous comments and artworks of young children confirm). Their joy is in no way diminished by their lack of conscious knowledge that they are the sheep (which will come later). It seems that theirs is a deeper level of knowledge, the biblical kind of knowledge, which denotes intimacy in a relationship.

These meditative, open-ended questions help the children to understand there is a treasure to be dug for, a mystery to be explored and a journey of discovery that will continue to unfold throughout their lives! When we reflect together with children in this way, it helps them to learn to meditate on their own."

### Further reflecting for older children

Over time, as the child grows this parable reveals new insights, which compliments the child's various phases of development. The image of Jesus as Good Shepherd brings the child a peaceful joy and continually invites and calls them into a close and loving relationship with Jesus. For older children some further points of reflection together might be:

- Firstly, invite each child to discuss what part of the parable stood out for them. You can share here too after the children.
- What does it mean that the Good Shepherd knows his sheep by name?
- Where does he lead them?
- What does it mean that he knows his sheep "just as the Father knows me and I know the Father?"
- What does it mean that there will be "one flock and one shepherd?"
- Finish by inviting the children re-read and reflect on their own during the day or week

### More ways to reflect on this parable

Depending on their age, you could also invite your children to reflect further in their own time on this parable by:

- Making a Prayer Card. Choose a verse or even one word from the parable that your child would like to write on a prayer card. If they are not yet writing you can write it for them, or write it separately for them to copy or trace. The card may be displayed on your family prayer table or a prayer space in your child's room.
- Draw or paint about the parable

When we invite children to respond by way of creative art, it is important for us adults to know that the focus should be on the process of creating art, rather than the product itself.

*"We are spectators of a special concentration...when a child chooses to do a drawing... Through the drawing the child expresses a particular listening, that God has engaged the child in, a contemplation that we can compare to that other free expression of the child: prayer...we also need to take care that the child is able to express herself or himself as spontaneously as possible." (Artistic Expression of Children in the Atrium - Tilde Cocchini Journal of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, 2001).*

