

Fourth Sunday of Easter
Fr. Chad S. Green
Holy Family Catholic Church
Kirkland, Washington
12 May 2019

Acts 13:14, 43-52
Psalm 100
Revelation 7:9, 14b-17
(John 10:14) John 10:27-30

The Voice of the Good Shepherd

This past week was an exciting week for me, personally, as I got to enjoy the visits of two priests and two nuns whose ministry I admire. One was the visit of Father Greg Boyle who was in Seattle this past week for two talks. Father Greg is a Jesuit priest from Los Angeles who for the past thirty years has led a ministry called Homeboy Industries, which helps gang members and prisoners rehabilitate, heal, and leave behind gangs, violence, and drug addictions, so that they can get a new—or sometimes a first—start on life.¹ He's also the author of two best-selling books about his ministry: *Tattoos on the Heart* and *Barking to the Choir*.

The other visitors were Saint Damien and Saint Marianne of Moloka'i. The relics of these two saints were brought here to Holy Family Parish by Sister Cheryl Wint, OSF, of Honolulu. In the 19th century, these two saints ministered with the people of Hawai'i who were afflicted with Hansen's disease (leprosy). Sister Cheryl, a Franciscan of the same religious community as Saint Marianne, came from Honolulu to bring the relics to us, and also to speak to us about the lives of Father Damien and Mother Marianne.

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Father Damien and Mother Marianne both lived in the 1800's and served at Kalaupapa on the island of Moloka'i in Hawai'i. This is the place where, in 1866, people afflicted with Hansen's disease (leprosy) were sent to keep them separated from the rest of the population.

This place is an isolated peninsula about 3 miles by 3 miles, that juts out from the base of the tallest sea cliffs in the world, about 2,000 feet high. These cliffs are magnificent and

awesome in their natural beauty—and they also make it very difficult for anyone on the peninsula below to climb up and go to any other part of the island. Therefore, this peninsula became a place that people with this disease could be banished for the rest of their life, and kept apart from the rest of the human family.

Father Damien volunteered to join them and also make himself an outcast, and to go serve as a priest for the people of Kalaupapa. On May 10, 1873, he arrived to begin 16 years of ministry there, until his death from leprosy in 1889. Less than a year before he died, his prayers were answered when Mother Marianne and some of her sisters were permitted to come to Moloka‘i and prepare to take over for Father Damien. Mother Marianne served in Kalaupapa for thirty years until her death of natural causes.

One comment that Sister Cheryl made during her talk to us was about the first missionaries who brought Christianity to Hawai‘i. The first Christian missionaries arrived in the 1820’s, so Father Damien and Mother Marianne were part of the early decades of bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the people of Hawai‘i. Sister Cheryl commented that one of the reasons why Christianity was received so well is that, at that time, the people of Hawai‘i were looking for a new god, so to speak. In a sense, they were ready to hear the Good News. They could be likened to the Gentiles in our First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles—delighted to hear the Good News of Salvation!²

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Father Greg’s ministry to the outcasts of Los Angeles reminds me of Father Damien’s and Mother Marianne’s ministry to the outcasts of Moloka‘i. His talk this week centered on the theme of his second book, which is subtitled: *The Power of Radical Kinship*. The importance of having compassion and tenderness on all people, and the importance for each of us to work on

making the circle of compassion include all people, especially those who are outcast and rejected.³

And something that Father Greg said resonated with Sister Cheryl's comment about the people of Hawai'i being ready for a new god. Father Greg told us something that his spiritual director said to him one time, which was that: "We need a bigger god than the one we have."

What did he mean by that? Not that we need our *actual* God to be bigger than He is. Rather, the problem is that our concept of God is *too small*. So, the god that we have—the god we *think* we have—the god that we relate to on a day-to-day basis—is not as big as the God that we *actually* have. Perhaps—like Sister Cheryl said of the Hawaiian people a couple centuries—perhaps we, too, are ready for a new god. A bigger god. Our *actual* God.

Our God who is good, kind, loving, merciful.⁴ Our God who promises to "wipe away every tear from [our] eyes"⁵—from the eyes of people suffering from a terrible disease in Moloka'i—from the eyes of people stuck in the cycle of gangs in Los Angeles—from the eyes of people who mourn the loss of a loved one; people who struggle with an addiction or money problems; people who are looking for a job or a home; people who are lonely or rejected; people hoping to repair their marriage, or reconcile with a family member or a friend.

People like, well, you and me. All of us. We all need a bigger God than the one we have. Because, no matter how good, kind, loving, and merciful we think God is—He's *always* bigger than we can imagine.⁶

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Today, the Fourth Sunday of Easter, is affectionately known as Good Shepherd Sunday. In all three years of our Gospel cycles, we hear a part of John Chapter 10, in which Jesus

describes Himself as the Good Shepherd. In today's Gospel, the Lord says to us: "My sheep hear my voice."⁷

What kind of voice do we hear from the Good Shepherd? Do we hear Him encouraging us? Do we hear Him forgiving us? Do we hear Him delighting in us? Do we hear him including us and loving us?

Meister Eckhart, a mystic from the 14th century, wrote: "Any talk of God that does not comfort you is a lie." If we're not feeling comforted by the voice of the Good Shepherd, then perhaps we're ready for a new god. Perhaps we need a bigger god. Perhaps we need to reject and renounce the lies and the voices of enemy spirits, and turn our eyes, ears, hearts, and prayers to the Holy Spirit.

Because, my friends, when we are filled with joy and the Holy Spirit⁸—when we get better at hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd—then we are better able to be a light to the nations and—like Father Damien, Mother Marianne, Sister Cheryl, and Father Greg—be an instrument of salvation for the world.⁹

¹ <https://homeboyindustries.org/>

² Acts 13:48: "The Gentiles were delighted when they heard this and glorified the word of the Lord."

³ Mother Teresa of Calcutta: "The problem with the world is that we draw the circle of our family too small."

⁴ Psalm 100:5

⁵ Revelation 7:17

⁶ John 10:29: "My Father . . . is greater than all . . ."

⁷ John 10:27

⁸ Acts 13:52: "The disciples were filled with joy and the holy Spirit."

⁹ Acts 13:47: "For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I have made you a light to the Gentiles, that you may be an instrument of salvation to the ends of the earth.'"