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A woman displays a sign during a vigil May 8 for victims of a shooting the day before at the STEM School Highlands Ranch in Colorado. (CNS/Reuters/Rick Wilking)



by Thomas Gumbleton

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I think it will help our reflection on the Scriptures today if we remember what the Gospels for the last couple of Sundays have revealed to us. Starting with Easter Sunday, we remember, I'm sure, how the women discovered the empty tomb. Then they ran and told the apostles. Peter and John run to the tomb and go in to look, Peter first and then John. They see the garments set aside very carefully and Peter leaves, but John remains for a short time.

The Gospel writer tells us, "When John went in he saw and believed," which Peter had not. If you remember, one of the reasons that is suggested for the difference is that John was well-known as the disciple who was especially the one who loved Jesus. There was a very strong bond of love.

## **Fourth Sunday of Easter**

[May 12, 2019](#)

Acts 13:14, 43-52

Psalm 100

Revelation 7:9, 14b-17

John 10:27-30

In the Book of Canticles, the author reminds us that love is stronger than death. Death cannot break the bonds of love. So John immediately realizes what has happened. Jesus is alive! Their bond is still there. It took a while for the other disciples to realize this.

You remember the following Sunday, Jesus appears to the whole community on Easter Sunday night. Do you remember what he did? He brought a message of peace. The first thing he says to these disciples who had abandoned him (Peter had even denied him), Jesus says, "Peace be with you." Then he breathed on them to share the risen life with them as God had breathed on the form of Adam and brought life to that form of human clay.

Then you remember that Jesus gave them a mission, "As God sends me, I will send you to bring this good news to the whole world and to invite people to follow me."

The following Sunday Jesus meets his disciples on a beach. That's where he displays his great mercy and his spirit of forgiveness and love, especially to Peter. Jesus challenges Peter three times, "Peter, do you love me?"

Peter said, "Yes, I love you."

A second time, "Do you love me?"

"Yes, Lord, I love you."

A third time, "Do you love me?"

"Yes, I love you."

Peter, probably not even realizing what Jesus was doing, was receiving the opportunity to repair the evil he had done when three times during a terrible night of Jesus' suffering before his crucifixion, three times Peter had denied Jesus. But now, "Do you love me?", and with each time Peter says with greater conviction, "I love you." He is totally healed of his sin, that terrible failure that he would never feel he could be forgiven for.

Today now on this fourth Sunday of Easter, we move on. Our first lesson today tells us there's something we're supposed to do with this message of Jesus. We're supposed to go out into the world and proclaim it. Paul and Barnabas start on their first missionary journey taking the word that Jesus has proclaimed to the rest of the world. It's the beginning.

Now, here it is 2,000 years later and it's our task to take that message to the world around us. Our Gospel lesson today tells us how to do this.

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First of all, John in the Gospel says to the disciples of Jesus, "Listen to him." That's what a disciple does most of all is listen, listen for Jesus' word to that disciple, to each one of us, and to do what Jesus asks of us. But then Jesus goes on — this is the end of [Chapter 10](#) in John's Gospel. That whole chapter is about Jesus as the Good

Shepherd. At the end of it, as we heard today, Jesus proclaims, "My sheep know me and I know them and they listen and follow me."

This is what we're called to do today — listen and follow. If we look into the earlier part of the Gospel (Chapter 10), I'm sure most of us remember that Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. I love my sheep and they love me. I lay down my life for my sheep," and asks us, if necessary, to lay down our life for one another.

We might think that would never be necessary. For most of us, of course, it will never happen that we will be called explicitly to lay down our lives for someone else. But it does happen.

It [happened again](#) just a short time ago in a high school where a killer comes into a classroom and declares he's going to kill those fellow students of his. One of the students leaps up, charges into the killer, and brings him down because after he had done that, the killer shot him three times, in fact. But others came and helped to bring him down. He lost his life, but he saved the lives of all his classmates and other kids in the school.

He literally gave his life for his friends. In the article that I read about this, the fellow student spoke about it. Kendrick Castillo, a senior, a couple of weeks away from graduation, very well-liked by his classmates. One of them said, "He cared about his faith and his family and friends more than himself or anything. He was always the first to help when anyone needed it; if it was a friend to talk to, someone to hold the door or carry something, he would always help no matter what." Even to the point of laying down his life for his friends.

Again, none of us will probably be challenged to that depth as followers of Jesus. But that's the path we should be on to love others as Jesus has loved us. "Greater love than this no one has," Jesus said at the Last Supper, "than the love to lay down your life for another."

That's the message we should be carrying into our world where we live in a climate of violence. We have to carry the message of love of the Good Shepherd. Listen to Jesus, take in his words, follow his example, and change the situation in our world. We know it's drastic, almost unbelievable. ...

Since 1970, more Americans have been [killed by guns](#) than Americans have been killed in all of the wars in all of the history of our country since 1776. That's an incredible number. More people in our country, innocent people, have been killed by guns than all of those who have died in our wars since 1776.

What's going on? What's wrong? We live in this climate of violence and we let it go on and on and on. Do we want all our children always to grow up in a school where they know almost any day, any moment, they will have to go into lockdown? Of course we don't.

But what do we do about it? We don't increase our restrictions on the sale of guns as we should. You have to undergo more of a background check to adopt a rescue dog than you have to go through to buy a gun. That's just absurd. But we won't change the laws to make it more difficult to obtain guns until we have more guns in our country than we have people.

If we really listen to the Scriptures today, to God's word, to what Jesus tells us about listening to him and following him, perhaps we will get the determination to demand changes in our public policies. Look how quickly in New Zealand the prime minister there, in less than a month, changed their laws to make it more difficult to get guns because they knew that was the source of the problem. Why don't we?

I hope that as we continue to reflect on the resurrection of Jesus and what he did for us in sharing the gift of his life on that Easter Sunday night, sharing his spirit with us, and asking us as he did that Easter Sunday night, he asked the first community of disciples, "Whose sins you forgive, they're forgiven. The sins you restrain, they are restrained."

We must try to restrain the evil that has overtaken our country so that our children can go to school every day without fearing that might be the day they have a lockdown. Jesus shows us the way, he invites to listen and follow. It's up to us to respond.

**Editor's note:** *This homily was given May 12 at St. Ambrose in Grosse Point Park, Michigan. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are [posted weekly](#) to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.*