

The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.

Alive in the risen Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, we bring our prayers before God who promises to hear us and answer in steadfast love.

A brief silence.

Loving Shepherd, you know your own and your own know you. Your voice calls us to your loving embrace. Strengthen your church throughout the world that we bear witness to your expansive love. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Gracious Shepherd, you are generous with the gifts of goodness and mercy. Restore your creation to wholeness so that cities and towns, countryside and wilderness, may abound with life. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Hope-giving Shepherd, the nations and peoples are your heritage. Place into the hearts of all leaders and rulers the passion to serve. Crucify any desire to overpower others and give leaders joy in lifting up the lowly. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Preparing for Next Week

Monday Psalm 95. **Tuesday** Revelation 7:13-17. **Wednesday** Mark 14:26-31. **Thursday** (commemoration of Catherine of Siena, theologian, 1380) Psalm 22:25-31. **Friday** Amos 8:11-13. **Saturday** (Philip and James, Apostles) John 14:8-14. **Fifth Sunday of Easter** (commemoration of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, 373) Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 22:25-31; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8.

Abiding Shepherd, your love flows as we reach out to those around us. Move us with your Spirit, so that we lay down our lives for those in need (*especially*). Help us love one another in truth and action. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Saving Shepherd, you restore us to wholeness. Help our community in our life together and give us vigor as a people of faith. In the midst of challenges and opportunities (*specific concerns may be named*), fill us anew with your Holy Spirit. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Eternal Shepherd, you hold us securely in your loving hands. In the assurance of resurrection hope, we remember our loved ones who have died in you (*especially the evangelist Mark*). Bring us, with them, to dwell in your house forever. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

In the hope of new life in Christ, we raise our prayers to you, trusting in your never-ending goodness and mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**



Celebrate

Fourth Sunday of Easter
April 25, 2021

The image of the good shepherd shows us how the risen Christ brings us to life. It is the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep, one of mutual knowledge and love, that gives the shepherd authority. The shepherd's willingness to lay down his life for the sheep shows his love. First John illustrates what it means to lay down our lives for one another by the example of sharing our wealth with any sibling in need.

Prayer of the Day

O Lord Christ, good shepherd of the sheep, you seek the lost and guide us into your fold. Feed us, and we shall be satisfied; heal us, and we shall be whole. Make us one with you, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

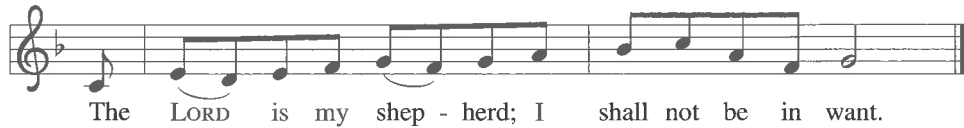
First Reading

Acts 4:5-12

Peter and John had been arrested the previous day because they were proclaiming the news of the resurrection to the people. In today's reading, Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit so that he can proclaim salvation in Jesus' name to the religious authorities.

The next day [the] rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem,⁶ with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family.⁷ When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?"⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders,⁹ if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man

has been healed,¹⁰ let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead.¹¹ This Jesus is 'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.'¹² There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."



The LORD¹ is my shepherd;
I shall not¹ be in want.

²The LORD makes me lie down¹ in green pastures
and leads me be-¹side still waters.

³You restore my¹ soul, O LORD,
and guide me along right pathways¹ for your name's sake.

⁴Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I shall¹ fear no evil;

for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they¹ comfort me. **R**

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence¹ of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is¹ running over.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days¹ of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the¹ LORD forever. **R**

Jesus' death on our behalf is the clearest demonstration of divine love. This is the very love we share with others, not just through our words but especially through our deeds. In sharing such love we fulfill God's commandments.

We know love by this, that [Jesus Christ] laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. ¹⁷How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

¹⁸Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. ¹⁹And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him ²⁰whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹Beloved,

if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; ²²and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

²³And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. ²⁴All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

In language that recalls the twenty-third psalm, Jesus describes himself as the shepherd who cares for his sheep. He is willing to die for them, and he is able to overcome death for them.

[Jesus said:] "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down

my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I 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. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."