

Fourth Sunday of Easter, A – April 26, 2026 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham – 5pm Sat. Vigil; 8:30/11:00am Sunday Masses – 750 words

On this “Good Shepherd Sunday”, I wish to focus on a particular line from St. John’s gospel that we just heard: where Jesus said, “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly”. The theme of abundance, connected with our Lord, is a recurrent one in John’s gospel. Think about the line from the end of the prologue or first chapter: “From his fullness” – it could also be translated as “abundance” – “we have all received, grace upon grace”. It seems to reflect the teaching of St. Paul from some 40 to 50 years before, when wrote in the Letter to the Romans, “where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more”.

Then, shortly after John’s prologue, we hear about the wedding feast of Cana. And again, we see great abundance: Christ not only solves the problem of the embarrassed bride and groom, whose wine had run out before their guests finished celebrating; but he did so by providing them with fine wine in an enormous quantity: six stone water jars full, each holding between 20 and 30 gallons. This means that he made as much as 180 gallons of good wine, which is the equivalent of just over 900 bottles that we might buy in the grocery store today. At today’s retail prices, the bill could have been over \$50,000. Incredible abundance!

A couple of chapters later, Christ tells the Samaritan woman that “whoever drinks of the water that [he will] give will never thirst”, and that it “will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life”. Two chapters later still, Jesus feeds the five thousand, transforming five barley loaves, a very small amount, into enough to feed 5,000 men, to say nothing of the women and children, and to have 12 baskets’ full left over. But here we are in John chapter six, and we know a lot about that chapter: how Christ also says that the one who feeds on him will *never* hunger, *never* thirst. Again, he provides astonishing abundance.

But the theme continues. In John 21 – after Christ’s death and while the disciples were still “processing” the fact of his Resurrection, Peter, and several other disciples had decided to go fishing... and, after a night on the sea, had caught nothing – not even the next day’s lunch, never mind something to sell at market. To their perplexity was likely added discouragement. But then Jesus appeared, having them lower their net, and they caught “153 large fish” – almost causing the net to burst. Besides the particular symbolism John intended, we again have the theme – now following the Resurrection – of great abundance.

Yes, what Jesus provided and promised in various ways while he walked on earth, he now gave them a concrete sign of as he prepared to ascend to his Father. And he has kept his promises ever since. We are mid-way through the Easter Season, on a journey toward the Ascension, then Pentecost, then Corpus Christi. And from the Lord’s surpassing *largesse*, we have all received “grace upon grace” – by passing through the streams of living water in baptism; by receiving his pardon in confession even after sin abounded; by the abiding gift of his Spirit in confirmation; by continually encountering him in Holy Communion.

Yes, he came that we might have life and have it abundantly, and he leads us to that life through the Sacraments. But this is not simply a future outcome: we encounter that abundant life here and now, again, through the sacraments. In the Eastern cultures, sheep were not shepherded by a dog that intimidated and pursued them, but by a man whose voice they learned to recognize, who led them as they followed after. Although in following Jesus, we must take up our crosses, yet he gives us much abundance here and now also!

Following Christ doesn’t mean being a dour, inhibited prude. There is great happiness, joy, meaning, and consolation all along our journey. And again, going back to St. Paul, it will reach a fullness that “eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it dawned upon the heart of man”. To

attain it, we must learn to know the Good Shepherd's firm and loving voice and follow where he leads, even though sometimes it be through a dark valley. Verdant, peaceful, replete pastures await – and every sacrament we receive worthily and well along the way is a pledge of what God has prepared for us, the sheep of his flock.