

**Homily for May 2, 2004  
4th Sunday of Easter C Cycle**

**By Father Charles Bowes**

**Acts 13:14, 43-52  
Revelation 7:9, 14-17  
John 10:27-30**

## *We, too, can take comfort even in powerlessness, revealed in Jesus, the Lamb of God.*

“They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,” says the Book of Revelation, chapter 7. “My sheep hear my voice; I know them and they follow me...they shall never perish,” says Jesus in John chapter 10.

Flocks of sheep, verdant pastures, still waters and the figure of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, are familiar images associated with the 4th Sunday of Easter. Today, however, a vision of the Lamb in the Book of Revelation, or Apocalypse, also takes center stage. As the paradoxical images reveal, this Lamb is an extraordinary creature. Although slain as a sacrificial offering, the Lamb stands victorious in the fullness of power and knowledge (Revelation 5:6-14). Despite its evident vulnerability, the Lamb is strong enough to bear suffering and to cleanse, nourish and protect others (Revelation 7:14-16). A humble creature, the Lamb nevertheless is judged worthy to receive “all praise, honor, glory and power, for ever and ever” (Revelation 5:14). Considered to be little more than a dumb, docile follower, the Lamb takes his place “at the center of the throne” and, taking up the role of Shepherd, guides his followers “to springs of the water

of life” (Revelation 7:17). Reflecting on these images of the Lamb become Shepherd, it would appear that the liturgy invites us to revisit our notions of power and leadership.

We are challenged to examine our views and reevaluate our assumptions regarding our understanding of power and its place in our personal lives, in the workings of church communities and in the political-economic arenas. For me, a major issue that comes from contemplating the Lamb of God centers on my need for control. Surely images of the Lamb slain on the altar of sacrifice or of the crucified Jesus suggest a total loss of control to the point where both the Lamb and the Christ are victims whose very lives are in the hands of others. Such images make me, and maybe you too, uneasy, even acutely uncomfortable. Look at the crucifix up here. That figure on the cross is not just a Jesus of long ago. That Jesus is you and me – our own best self-subject to all that we resist and find odious: powerless, not in charge, pinned, nailed, naked, vulnerable. And yet we know, deep inside, that really is who we are and what life is ultimately like – so overwhelming that of ourselves that we can do nothing. As we gaze upon the crucified, we spend energy trying to make sense out of these images of powerlessness with our desire to be in

charge, to have people and events conform to our plans and timetables or to see ourselves as competent, effective, important.

It takes a long time, a lifetime maybe, to come to terms with the powerlessness of the Lamb of God that invites a power totally other and different and of God's own design greater than we could ever imagine. It takes prayer. It takes conversion to surrender to such a mystery – and the prayer and the conversion are themselves God's deed, God's doing, in God's time and on God's terms. The revelation, the glorious revelation we have in Jesus risen, is that God will do it. God will transform our powerlessness and our yearning to be in control. This faith is what brings us here and to this table of word and bread and cup. See how fragile are the bread and wine, how passing are the words we utter. And yet, the bread and wine are more easily convinced that they are the body of Christ than are we so convinced. Those who are at the table become what's on the table – powerless yet victorious.

So let us pray: "We rest in your hands, most merciful God, as securely as a child in loving arms. Let us hear your voice calling us to life without end, and love without measure, through Christ our Lord. Amen."

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