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**From the Selected Works of Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell, S.T.L., S.S.L., D.Phil.**

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April 21, 2013

## Pastoral Responsibilities in Israel and Church

Lawrence E. Frizzell, *Seton Hall University*



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# **Pastoral Responsibilities in Israel and Church**

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**Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell  
Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies  
Seton Hall University  
South Orange, NJ**

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## **Fourth Sunday of Easter**

April 21, 2013 Sunday Readings for Cycle C:

Acts 13:14, 43-52; Ps 100; Rv 7:9-17; Jn 10:27-30

### **PASTORAL RESPONSIBILITIES IN ISRAEL AND CHURCH**

*Lawrence E. Frizzell*

Because Moses and David were shepherds before they were chosen to serve God by leading the Israelites, it was natural for prophet and psalmist to describe authority as a pastoral function. Because Israelites knew that lambs look innocent and sheep are not bright enough to defend themselves, the prophets depicted the people of God as a flock on a journey in search of safety and pasture. They needed wise and courageous shepherds to protect them from danger and foster their best interests, even in spite of themselves. Ezekiel offered a biting critique of Israel's leaders at the time of the Exile (586 B.C.) and promised that eventually God would deliver them. "I will save my sheep so that they will no longer be despoiled, and I will judge between one sheep and another. I will appoint one shepherd over them to pasture them, my servant David... I, the LORD, will be their God and my servant David shall be prince among them. I, the LORD, have spoken" (Ez 34:22-24).

The Gospel records how Jesus built upon this millennial tradition of the prophets and psalmists to describe his compassion and his work. "Jesus pitied the crowd, for they were like sheep without a shepherd and he began to teach them at great length" (Mk 6:34). He would pursue the lost sheep until he found it (Lk 15:4-7). Drawing upon Ezekiel, the Fourth Gospel developed these themes of Jesus' teaching into a magnificent synthesis. The statement of Jesus' mission is pastoral: "I came that they might have life and have it to the full" (Jn 10:10). This is followed by the declaration that his work combines the role of shepherd with that of priest-and-victim. "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays his life down for his sheep" (10:11). The true shepherd knows his sheep and they trust him implicitly as their great benefactor (10:3, 14-16). The Gospel read this coming Sunday is a succinct appendix to the "allegory of the good shepherd". Listening to the Master's voice the sheep follow him and receive the gift of eternal life (10:27-18). No external force can interfere with the work of this shepherd, first because the heavenly Father has given this mission to Jesus, and second because "the Father and I are one" (10:30). Thus does Jesus declare that he is the Son of God and the Lord of history.

While the teachers of Israel prepared the faithful for the promise of God's Kingdom (his manifest authority accepted by all creatures) and the gift of eternal life, the role of the Messiah in this plan was presented in panoply of varied details. Nowhere was the message clear that the inner mystery of God involved the dynamic life of three equal Persons. An additional dimension to traditional faith is required by the Gospel message. Both John and the Acts of the Apostles describe the challenge that this doctrine of the Messiah's divinity posed to Jewish people in the first century. Indeed, some leaders opposed Jesus because he was upsetting the delicate balance of power between the Sadducean priesthood and the Roman Empire (see Jn 11:49-52). Other Jews, however, simply found the claim to be contrary to their belief in the one God. The

Christian message is more than the collection of the sum-total of Israel's prophetic oracles. The very richness of the Jewish heritage provided the basis for presenting several "models" of what the Messiah should be and do. The way Jesus accomplished the mission was paradoxical: victory through suffering and death rather than by judgment in court or by military power. Even the disciples achieved the new synthesis of faith only after Jesus revealed himself as risen Lord!

As the Apostles moved through the Mediterranean world, they presented the Gospel first to Jewish communities in various cities. The encounter of St. Paul with people in the synagogue of Antioch in Pisidia is described by St. Luke in this Sunday's reading from Acts 13. The initial impression of the Apostle's homily seemed to be positive: "Many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas" (13:43). During the week it seems that the converts had stimulated the interest of friends, so "the following sabbath almost the entire city gathered to hear the Word of God" (13:44). This should have pleased the synagogue leaders, but they realized that Paul was using the pulpit to proclaim a new interpretation of the Scriptures. Luke accused them of jealousy (13:45) but perhaps they also discerned a threat to the order of their little community. They succeeded in expelling Paul and Barnabas, displaying a religious animosity that tragically became the pattern in so many Jewish-Christian encounters over the centuries. Both communities should have listened to Gamaliel: "Have nothing to do with these people... If their purpose or activity is human in its origins, it will destroy itself. If it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy it without fighting God himself" (Acts 5:38-39).