

# Sunday Homily

## 4TH SUNDAY OF EASTER

25 APRIL 2021

YEAR B

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK IV

"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd is one who lays down his life for his sheep."

### Illustration

A simple wooden cross with its inscription, "No matarás", stands by the side of a road on the outskirts of Lima, in Peru. Emphasising the commandment "You shall not kill", it recalls a sister of the Missionary Society of St Columban who was killed at this spot alongside escaped prisoners in 1983.

Sister Joan Sawyer was aged fifty-one when she and eight prisoners died on the dusty road outside a squalid prison in Peru's capital city. Originally from Ireland, Sister Joan used to go to the Lurigancho Prison three or four days a week to visit prisoners. Conditions there were bad, and out of five thousand prisoners only one thousand had been sentenced. The rest were awaiting sentence and many were probably innocent. Sister Joan used to bring them relief – medicines for some, a kind word for others, news about how their legal papers were progressing in the Ministry for Justice. The majority came from the poor areas of Lima where they never had enough to eat, didn't finish school and couldn't find decent work.

On the morning of 14th December 1983 a group of prisoners tried to escape. Sister Joan was one of the hostages taken. After all-day negotiations with the prison authorities it was agreed that the prisoners and their hostages would be allowed to leave the prison in the evening in an ambulance. They were no sooner outside the prison gate than waiting police riddled the ambulance with bullets from all sides. Four bullets struck Joan and when she was removed from the ambulance she was dead.

During Joan's funeral, a large banner placed over the altar read: "There is no greater love than to lay down your life for your friends."

### Gospel Teaching

All four Gospel writers use the metaphor of Jesus as shepherd. God is also described as a shepherd in Hebrew scripture. So John's use of the metaphor is nothing new. What is new is John's description of the relationship between the shepherd and the individual sheep.

John explains that the life and work of Jesus demonstrate God's love for every individual. Jesus the shepherd knows the name of each one of his sheep and each person has a one-to-one relationship with Jesus. It's a two-way relationship.