

***Fifth Sunday of Easter***  
***May 3, 2026***  
***Year of the Church in History***

*“But they that entertain evil purposes in their hearts, bring upon themselves death and captivity, especially they that claim for themselves this present world, and boast in its riches, and cleave not to the good things that are to come.”*  
*(The Shepherd of Hermas)*

The first generation of Christians, after the Apostles, used various stories to relate faith in Jesus as Messiah and Lord. One of these early texts was *The Shepherd of Hermas*. This work would be considered mystical or apocalyptic literature. It is similar, in this fashion, to the Book of Revelation found in our New Testament. The author was a Christian named Hermas. Although the date of its composition has been lost to time, the work was known and quoted by early Fathers such as Saint Irenaeus of Lyons (Gaul) and Clement, Tertullian and Origen (Alexandria, Egypt and North Africa). Our tradition associates the author Hermas with the same Hermas who is mentioned by Saint Paul (Romans 16:14) as a member of the Christian community of Rome in A.D.58. The work was divided into three sections. These are: *Visions*, *Mandates* and *Similitudes*. The *Visions* were an introduction to the work with the Shepherd coming at the end. He teaches Hermas his moral lessons by the use of allegorical stories in both the *Mandates* (12 in number) and *Similitudes* (10 in number). Due to time constraints, we will not be able to devote a Sunday reflection upon each of the *Mandates* and *Similitudes*, but we will reflect upon some of these as the Holy Spirit directs us.

*“The master, who had reared me, had sold me to one Rhoda in Rome. After many years, I met her again, and began to love her as a sister. . . [He sees her bathing]. . . So, seeing her beauty, I reasoned in my heart, saying, ‘Happy were I, if I had such an one to wife both in beauty and in character.’ I merely reflected on this and nothing more. . . [She appears in a vision and confronts him concerning his “Thoughts”]. . . I answered her and said, ‘Sin against thee? In what way? Did I ever speak an unseemly word unto thee? Did I not always regard thee as a goddess? Did I not always respect thee as a sister? How couldst thou falsely charge me, lady, with such villainy and uncleanness? Laughing she saith unto me, ‘**The desire after evil entered into thine heart.**’”* (The Shepherd of Hermas)

The *Visions* begin by introducing Hermas to the reader. He is a Christian man who had been sold as a child to a woman named Rhoda. Although to our modern ears this may seem shocking but it was more common during ancient Roman times. If a Christian family could no longer provide for their children, a child or multiple children could become a servant or servants in an affluent Christian home. In this fashion, they would have a home, food, receive an education and eventually gain their freedom. After being set free, many could go on to have very productive lives for themselves. This appears the case for Hermas. His guardian has raised him as a Christian and seen that he is offered to a good Christian

home. After this time as a servant for Rhoda, Hermas is set free. With his freedom granted, Hermas would begin to secure his own fortune, becoming a landowner with a wife and children. Through all of this, he would remain friendly with Rhoda.

The *Visions* of Hermas would begin after his encounter with Rhoda while he assisted her coming out of the Tiber River. Seeing her beauty, Hermas would have “Thoughts” (with little ears present, we will be careful how we speak). As he traveled home that day, he stopped to rest and was taken up to a tactless waste in his vision. Frightened, he would confess his sins aloud. As he is confessing, the figure of Rhoda appears and confronts him concerning his “Thoughts.” It is this moment, when faced with the reality of the sinful nature of his “Thoughts,” Hermas begins his road to repentance. Remember, Hermas was a Christian, but he was a lukewarm Christian at best. In the *Visions* that follow, he is guided to see himself as he truly is, as he is known by God.

With our Introduction complete, what may we glean from Hermas’ first *Vision*? Hermas, along with all of us, must admit we have failed God much too often through our lackadaisical approach with our faith life. Hermas rationalized his “Thoughts” as nothing but “Thoughts,” but at what point can we ever assume any “Thought” is not offensive to God’s Love. Furthermore, we find that Hermas has a problem with habitual “Story-Telling” and blames himself for not correcting his wife when she gossips about others. Adding to these, Hermas’s own children do not practice the Christian faith. Hermas comes to realize, although he appears a good Christian, he is dead inside. He has allowed his “Thoughts,” his “Story-Telling” and his overall unwillingness to even try to improve in spirit life to rob him of his joy. Hermas must name and admit these faults before God’s Holy Spirit can begin the work of restoring him to health. We must be willing to do the same. We must begin with a serious reflection of who we have allowed ourselves to become. How have the situations I have lived through changed me? Am I a more joyful Christian at peace with God, myself and others? Or have I allowed life’s struggles to rob me of my joy? I have become bitter, cynical or untrusting toward God, myself and others? Like Hermas, we must name our areas of sin and weakness, speak these aloud in the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) allowing ourselves to let go of past hurts and disappointments. Only then will we take the first steps toward a gradual opening of our hearts to God’s Holy Spirit. *The Shepherd of Hermas* begins with a humble admission: “I am a sinner towards God’s Love and am in need of His Merciful Grace.” In just the same manner, the story of our life must begin with this same humble admission.