

04/30/2023. 4th Sunday of Easter Year A (Good Shepherd Sunday)

Acts 2:14, 36-41/ 1 Peter 2:20-25/ John 10:1-10

Today is known as 'Good Shepherd Sunday', and each year the gospel reading focuses on some aspect of Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

Back in Jesus' time everyone knew about shepherds, their sheep, and how shepherds and sheep interacted with each other. Not so today. Few of us have watched shepherds tending their sheep. But if we think of shepherding as leadership, we can get a better grasp of what it means for us in our times.

A sheep farmer whose neighbor's dogs were continually killing his sheep. To remedy the situation, he came up with three options: (1) He could sue and bring his neighbor to court. (2) He could build a stronger and higher fence to keep the dogs out. (3) Finally, he chose the third option: he gave two lambs to his neighbor's children. In due time the lambs grew up and had other little lambs and the neighbor and his children had to see the sheep and they soon penned in their dogs and the problem was solved.

In Palestine, the word "shepherd" was a synonym for selfless love, sincerity, commitment, and sacrificial service. Hence, Jesus selects it as the most fitting term to denote his life and mission. Both the Old and New Testaments use the image of a Shepherd and His flock to describe the unique relation of God to Israel and of the Christ to Christians. Jesus' love and concern for each of us must be accepted with trust and serenity because he alone is our Shepherd, and no one else deserves our undivided commitment. As a true Shepherd, he leads his sheep, giving them the food and protection.

"A wolf found great difficulty in getting at the sheep owing to the vigilance of the shepherd and his dogs. But one day it found the skin of a sheep that had been flayed and thrown aside, so it put it on over its own pelt and strolled down among the sheep. The lamb that belonged to the sheep, whose skin the wolf was wearing, began to follow the wolf in the sheep's clothing; so, leading the lamb a little apart, he soon made a meal of her." Someone can quote and preach the Gospel to you, making all the right sounds and looking very serious, while robbing you spiritually – robbing you even of the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit in you: your real wisdom, your understanding...your fortitude...your joy.... Jesus gives the Spirit; the deceiver steals it away. One cannot give what one does not have. A leader filled with self-doubt will project that on to those whom he or she is leading.

Self-punishment leads to punishment of others; Doubt of self leads to doubt of others. Leaders: it's not about you; it's about those in your care.

Pope Francis is calling us to serve a purpose greater than ourselves, to get over self-concern and devote ourselves to the concerns of others. Good leaders smell the smell of the sheep and immerse themselves in the mud of human failures and human problems. We need to be good shepherds and good leaders. Everyone who is entrusted with the care of others is a shepherd. Hence, pastors, parents, teachers, doctors, nurses, government officials, caregivers, among others, are all shepherds.

We become good shepherds by loving those entrusted to us, praying for them, spending our time, talents and blessings for their welfare, and guarding them from physical and spiritual dangers. Parents must be especially careful of their duties toward their children by giving them good example. Above all, parents should pray for their children and infuse into them sound Christian moral principles. Today, the Church calls us to reflect on the meaning of God's call and to pray for vocations to the priesthood, the diaconate and the consecrated life, reminding us that the entire Christian community shares the responsibility for fostering vocations.

We also need to be good sheep in the fold of Jesus, the Good Shepherd: Our local parish is our sheepfold. Jesus is the High Priest, the pastors are their helpers and the parishioners are the sheep. Hence, as the good sheep of the parish, parishioners are expected to: (a) Hear and follow the voice of our shepherds through their homilies, Bible classes, counseling and advice. (b) Receive the spiritual food given by our pastors by regular participation in the Holy Mass, by frequenting the Sacraments and by prayer services, renewal programs and missions. (c) Cooperate with your pastors by giving them positive suggestions for the welfare of the parish, by encouraging them in their duties, by lovingly correcting them with constructive criticism and by praying for them. (d) Actively participate in the work of various councils, ministries and parish associations.

So, let's you and I get over our self-concerns and devote all of our concerns to whom God has placed in our lives to care for, to develop, and to succeed in all their endeavors as they journey through life headed back home to our Father in heaven. Treat each person in your care as a uniquely dignified individual, a person made in God's image and likeness, beloved by God and precious in His sight. Do that and you will be a good shepherd. **Amen.**