

4/21/2024 4th Sunday of Easter Year B (Good Shepherd)

Acts 4:8- 2, 1 Jn.3:1-2, Jn.10:11-18

A man comes upon a shepherd guarding his flock and proposes a bet: "I will bet you, against one of your sheep, that I can tell you the exact number in this flock," the man says. The shepherd accepts. "973," says the man. The shepherd, astonished at the accuracy, says "ok take the sheep you have won." The man picks a 'sheep' and begins to walk away. "Wait," cries the shepherd, "Let me have a chance to bet you. I can guess your exact occupation." "Sure," replies the man. "You work for the Tax office," says the shepherd. "Amazing!" responds the man, "How did you deduce that?" "Well," says the shepherd, "if you will first put down my dog, I will tell you."

In the Gospel, Jesus says that as Good Shepherd he knows his sheep and loves them so much that he is ready to die for them. The Gospel offers us both comfort and challenge. The comforting Good News is that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, knows us, provides for us and loves us. The challenge is for us to become good shepherds to those entrusted to our care and good sheep in our parish, the sheepfold of Jesus the Good Shepherd.

Jesus contrasts himself from a "hired man" who abandons the sheep when the wolves come. He is different from a hired man because Jesus has concern for his sheep. Jesus is a Shepherd who cares for his flock. His caring can be seen in his great love for his sheep. He loves his sheep so much that he is willing to lay down his life for them. Secondly, he is a Shepherd who feels compassion for his sheep. Sheep are powerless in the face of wolves. He shows compassion for them by protecting them from harm. Thirdly, he is a Shepherd who guides his sheep. Sheep cannot graze on barren land, but someone must lead them to pasture, to water, and to shelter. They must be sought out when they are separated from the flock because they will never find a way back themselves.

Everyone who is entrusted with the care of others is a shepherd. Hence pastors, parents, teachers, doctors, nurses, government officials and politicians are all shepherds. Since shepherding a diocese, a parish, a civil community or a family is very demanding sacrifice and vigilance every day. We become good shepherds by loving those entrusted to us, praying for them, spending our time, talents, health and wealth for their welfare, and guarding them from physical and spiritual dangers. Parents must be especially careful of their duties as shepherds, becoming role models for their children by leading exemplary lives.

And humbly I ask you, my dear people of God, to pray for us priests that we will lead you to hear the voice of Jesus and to follow Him to the green pastures of eternal life. Yes, pray for us priests and pray for those who are preparing for the priesthood and for those who are thinking about the priesthood. Let us pray for vocations to priestly and religious life so that we may have more holy and Spirit-filled shepherds to lead, feed and protect the Catholic community. **Amen.**
