

HOMILY for 4th SUNDAY of EASTER – Year A

This Sunday's Gospel talks about the Good Shepherd & the sheep, which reminds me of this cute story about a sheep dog that I would like to share with you.

When the farmer arrived at the obedience school to pick up his newly trained sheep dog, he asked the instructor for a demonstration. The two men & the dog went to a nearby field, where the dog immediately pointed to a clump of brush, then rolled over twice.

"There are two sheep in there," the instructor said; & sure enough, two sheep were flushed. A minute later, the dog pointed to another bunch of bushes, & then rolled over five times.

"There are five sheep in there," the instructor noted; & indeed five sheep were driven from the brush. Then, the dog pointed to a third clump. He began to whine & run in circles until he found a stick & shook mightily & dropped at the men's feet.

"And in that clump of brush there," the proud instructor concluded, "there are more sheep than you can shake the stick at!"

Anyhow, this fourth Sunday of Easter is often called Good Shepherd Sunday. Today's Gospel describes it as following, "...The one who enters through the gate is shepherd of the sheep; the keeper opens the gate for him. The sheep hear his voice as he calls his own by name & leads them out. When he has brought those that are his, he walks in front of them & the sheep follow him because they recognize his voice... Jesus therefore said to them again: '...I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be safe. He will go in & out, & find pasture. The thief comes only to steal & slaughter & destroy. I came that they might have life & have it to the full.'" The Gospel first tells us that the good shepherd has to be welcomed & approved by the gatekeeper. Anyone who is not & decides to climb over the gate is not the good shepherd at all. Jesus basically wants to contrast Himself to other religious leaders because He has been approved by God the Father while they have not. Next, what truly distinguishes Jesus from other religious leaders are these good qualities.

First, the good shepherd like Jesus has a distinct voice that only His sheep would be able to recognize & then run to Him. So, what kind of voice does the good shepherd have? Is it a voice of scaring & intimidating? Or, is it one of reassuring & caring? The good shepherd gives the sheep great protection & safety. They feel safe & well-protected when they are around him. On the contrary, a thief or a wild animal only comes to steal & destroy the sheepfold. It does not care about the welfare of the sheep or their future. It only focuses on its benefits & desires. The good shepherd is surely different from that. He cares about his sheep & puts their safety & wellbeing before his own. He is willing to sacrifice his own life for his sheep. He walks in front of them to show them the way & clear up any danger or hurdle that might harm his sheep. The sheep are familiar with the voice of the shepherd & could count on him for guidance & protection.

Second, the good shepherd leads his sheep to green pasture & lets them graze contently. Without green pasture & a good source of nourishment, the sheep would get malnourished & die. As you might know, all living things have to have proper nourishment to help them stay alive. Nothing in this world would be healthy & last long without a good source of nourishment. Most people often do not think that a good leader would be responsible for the nourishment & growth of the community. That is why we have seen many leaders who pay

very little attention to the homeless, the misfortunate, the poor, the folks with mental health problems, & the social outcast. They do not care if their community is healthy & thriving or not. However, today's Gospel reminds us that the good shepherd/leader must lead one's people/community to green pasture & help them find good nourishment. If any shepherd/leader does not take this responsibility seriously, the person does not deserve to keep that position.

Lastly, today's Gospel reminds us that the good shepherd/leader always brings life to the sheep & helps them enjoy it to the fullest. So, the good shepherd/leader must help the sheep find life & extend it as long as possible. As you might know, many human leaders often do not put the life of their people/community before their own profits & ambition. They certainly would not care about extending the life of their people/community & making it enjoyable. Thankfully, Jesus is our good shepherd, who came to bring us life by offering His life on the Cross & reconcile us with God the Father. But, He did not stop there. Rather, He wanted us to enjoy life to the fullest by promising us the eternal life in His kingdom. In that new life, we will no longer be subject to pain & suffering, or even death. There will not be tears & sadness. There will only be peace & happiness. For Jesus the risen Christ has conquered death & prepared the kingdom of Heaven for all His sheep to enjoy peace & happiness forever. St. Peter, in today's Second Reading, summarizes our good shepherd's great work for us as following, "...In His own body, He brought your sins to the Cross so that all of us, could live in accord with God's will. By His wounds, you were healed. At one time, you were straying like sheep; but now you have returned to the shepherd, the guardian of your souls."

My dear brothers & sisters, Jesus is indeed the good shepherd who truly cares about our safety & wellbeing. He is willing to sacrifice His own life on the Cross to bring us reconciliation with God the Father & the promise of the eternal life in the kingdom of Heaven. He always walks before us to guide us to green pasture & help us find nourishment & respite for our bodies & souls. He is sure concerned about our lives & wants us to enjoy it to the fullest. We certainly feel safe & well taken care of when we are around Him. I hope we will always follow Him & not somebody else. I pray that we will recognize His voice & listen to His guidance. When we do that, we will be able to enjoy peace & happiness even right here in this life.