

## April 25, 2021

Acts 4:8-12; 1 Jn 3:1-2; Jn 10:11-18

Jesus says that he is the Good Shepherd. The image of the shepherd is powerful, and Jesus chooses it carefully. A shepherd is vital to the life and survival of the sheep - the shepherd is a trusted guide, a fearless defender, a caring provider. Jesus is all of these things for us. To be guided, defended, and provided for we have to be sheep that listen, trust, and follow. Just like individual members of a flock of sheep will wander, get lost, and be harmed if they go it alone - so too we have to stick close to Jesus and rely on him. So let's reflect on how Jesus fulfills the role of the shepherd, and also how we can be the sheep who really know Him and who follow Him.

To be a shepherd requires a sense of responsibility and a unique relationship to the sheep. Jesus shows he is more than a hired hand, and demonstrates the depth of his relationship to the sheep, in his passion, death and resurrection. He reminds us: *I lay down my life for my sheep*. To the people listening to Him speak this would be extreme. The best shepherd would defend the flock, would fight for them - but would not let himself be killed for sheep. You can get always get more sheep - heck even the best shepherd was going to sell them someday anyway. But Jesus is different. Although the sheep are his property the good shepherd treats them like family members. He cares for the flock so much he would even take the step to give his life for them. We have to appreciate what a huge act this is! God gains nothing in doing this - it is a pure act of love for us. In fact, Jesus' care for His flock is so deep that it extends even beyond His death. He speak about being with us until the end of time and talks today of his future shepherding when he says that he must yet bring others into his fold.

The Good Shepherd cared for the sheep while alive, gave His life willingly in sacrifice so that His sheep might be freed, and He could not stay parted from them after His death. He rose from the dead so that he could be with them in a more powerful and lasting way - a way that is not centered on one figure in one place - but a mysterious presence that covers the whole face of the earth. Look at what will happen shortly at this altar. Rather than us having to wait as the people of Jesus' time did for Him to travel to their village, rather than waiting the many years in our time it would take to get a visit from Jesus traveling around the world, He allowed his resurrection to transform Him in a way that permitted Him to be present at every Mass, residing in every

Tabernacle, and mysteriously embodied in His Church and in his assistant shepherd (the Bishops). The Bishop carries a shepherd's staff as a symbol of his role of shepherding a portion of the flock, and he empowers priests to help him. In this way, the Good Shepherd is given hands and a voice and through them Jesus still cares for the sheep and is made present to all in the sacraments.

Jesus still guides us through His voice expressed in Scripture and Tradition and interpreted for us by the Holy Spirit acting through the Church. He still defends us from the evils of this world and by His influence, has saved us from many more dangers than we realize. By his intercession with the Father and the power of His presence in the Sacraments, he saves us from hell and opens for us the peace and safety of His kingdom. Like the shepherd who brings the flock to a field to graze in and a stream to drink from, he still provides for us allowing us to obtain the many practical things that we need in life - all these things are not rights, but gifts. No shepherd ever died for his flock, and then pledged himself to an eternity of shepherding them after his death - it is unique, it is amazing, it is the most fantastic example of shepherding by the shepherd who would not let even death get in the way of him caring for the sheep.

For our part, we must be good sheep. Sheep in the flock learn the specific voice of their shepherd and follow that voice knowing that he leads them to safety. The true shepherd knows which sheep are his and they know who their shepherd is. Jesus tells us today that *I know mine and mine know me*. It is being tuned to Jesus' voice that we can know when he speaks to us or when it is another. Earlier in this Gospel Jesus says about his sheep: *a stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers*. Sheep of the Good Shepherd must study and learn - must build a personal relationship - so that they will know who he is and recognize him. The good sheep will also work together to become the one fold that Jesus speaks of today - one fold under the one Shepherd. The courage of the shepherd, the openness of the sheep, the acceptance of the roles we have been assigned in the Body of Christ allows us to become that one flock - and allows the flock to be a model to the world of listening to the voice of the Good Shepherd. This is the shepherd who gave His life for us, this is the shepherd who provides for us daily, this is the shepherd who seeks to enlarge his fold continuously so that as many as possible may be saved. Thanks be to our Good Shepherd, may He who protects, guides, and cares for us be ever praised in all nations.