

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter 2020  
Homily/Reflection  
Fr. Ed

What do I want? If we pause for just a moment and asked ourselves this question, we realized we could answer it in a multitude of ways. In these days of pandemic, maybe the answer is: I want normality. Maybe our answer is: I want to see family and friends again. Maybe our answer is: I don't know, because perhaps in the midst of uncertainty, we're not sure where to go. There are a number of ways we can answer: what do I want? In times of crisis or pandemic, the answer to this question is often refined quite a bit and our answers not only align with what we want but what we need. Sometimes in life, needs and wants can be two very different things. When put to the test, we often want what we need: security, food, clothing, shelter, relationships, etc.

In Psalm 23, our Responsorial Psalm this Sunday, it says: *The Lord is my Shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.* This Sunday is not only the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter but commonly referred to as Good Shepherd Sunday where Jesus describes Himself as the Good Shepherd. We are invited in midpoint of the Easter Season to explore the dynamic that exists between shepherd and sheep and how that relates to Jesus and us.

This week is also a turning point. Much like we are anticipating turning points such as the reopening of government, business, and hopefully Church is a few weeks, so too is our Easter focus. Until now, we've been hearing a consistent theme of Resurrection accounts where the Risen Lord is appearing to disciples in various ways; the Upper Room, in the Garden, and on the Road to Emmaus. All of these happen on the first day of the week as Sacred Scripture tells us, echoing to us that in the Risen Christ, we are made new; we have new life. But now, we reach the midpoint of our Easter journey and begin turning our attention to what we will celebrate in a few weeks, Pentecost.

So, in these weeks of preparation, we are reminded that Jesus is Shepherd. We know that a shepherd guides, watches, and protects the sheep. Sheep in Jesus' time were a precious commodity and so too are we, we are precious in God's eyes. The shepherd also has the ability by sound of voice, to call the sheep by name, so much so that even if one flock were to intermingle with another, the sheep of one flock can distinguish the voice of its shepherd verses that of another. The sheep can hear the true shepherd's voice and with calm and certainty know they are being led in the right direction, on a path that leads them to life.

One of the things that we need then, is to be able to truly hear the voice of Jesus the Good Shepherd, to truly distinguish the voice of the Lord above or apart from all others. This means that we really have to listen. We know that our world is a world of competing voices and competing goods. Sometimes we can go astray if we listen to the voice of a shepherd that is not our Good Shepherd.

In our inner depths we know that to listen to the Good Shepherd is not a want but a need. It is a need because the voice of the Good Shepherd is the gate, the gate we pass through to salvation. How is this? First, we remind ourselves that we are made for God, that the goal of who we are and our life's journey is to be with God for all eternity. Further, we see in the book of Ezekiel 34:11-12 that the image of the shepherd is not something relatable and cute but rather, the image of a shepherd is God Himself.

Ezekiel 34:11-12 says: *For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out.* Again, another image, just like that of the Risen Christ seeking out The Disciples in the Upper Room, God's mercy is seeking out us His sheep. As the passage goes onto say, that God will seek out His sheep even when some of the flock has been scattered abroad. In this time of pandemic, do we not feel scattered at times? Do we not feel a bit lost or disoriented?

So what can we say then about our mission or goal this week? It is simple, yet hard. Listen for the voice of Jesus the Good Shepherd. Perhaps this happens in prayer, in Scripture, in conversation with others, and in other signs. When we listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd, truly we shall not want. When we listen to the voice of the Shepherd, as Psalm 23 says: our souls will find rest, even amidst foes and evil the rod and staff of the Lord give us courage and comfort. We are in uncertain times, but the Shepherd leads us with certainty through the storm and gives us what we need.

If we need any further direction or insight into this we need look no further than the document Lumen Gentium which comes from the Second Vatican Council, in paragraph 6 it says:

*The Church is a sheepfold whose one and indispensable door is Christ. It is a flock of which God Himself foretold that He would be the shepherd, and whose sheep, although ruled by human shepherds, are nevertheless continuously led and nourished by Christ Himself, the Good Shepherd and the Prince of the shepherds, who gave his life for the sheep.*  
(Lumen Gentium, no. 6)