

4 Sunday Easter 5/3/20  
Robbers, Thieves and Good Shepherds

The Scriptures on this 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter hold wonderful images of **safety**: sheepfold, sheep gate, a good shepherd to follow in Jesus. and of dwelling in the Lord's house... No wonder its called good shepherd Sunday.

Then St. Peter features prominently in the other readings:  
the 1<sup>st</sup> of those Christ entrusted with the role Pope Francis carries out now:  
the one who guides the flock of Christ on earth in Jesus' name.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> reading is actually encouragement from I Peter: when you suffer for doing what is good, it's a grace... a staying close to the shepherd and guardian of your soul.  
Suffering, if with Christ, can be a place of safety.

All comforting images—especially contrasted with robbers, thieves, lurking about.

How safe are you feeling these days of pandemic, economic stress?

How worried are you about your safety? About life itself?

Most are less worried about oneself than we are about making someone vulnerable ill.

That care-for-you attitude has been a beautiful thing:

But that attitude of staying home, wearing a mask & social distance when out, like many of our motivations, can come from helpful, or a harmful place.

I was going to the bank. Checked if I could wear a mask in the bank. Am I wearing it to keep you safe from illness, or am I wearing it to rob?

This mask can reveal a Christ—or hide the thief and robber.

It's important we recognize Jesus' voice and the safety HE calls me to, so after pandemic, taking care of me has not led me to become the thief who wants to take from me the abundance of life that is ours if Christ is my gateway to life.

See, if wearing this mask and other actions are really **for us—for the flock**— so life of loving neighbor as myself can thrive, then the mask reflects that I've heard the voice of the one St. Peter reminds us **bore sins of others**... put us before his own well-being.

I can be inconvenienced, even suffer, for the good of more than me—like a Good Shepard.

It means I respond to Jesus' idea of abundant life, and a verdant pasture—where my life is not my own. **Not my own.**

Pope Francis prayed that among the graces from this challenging time...be a renewed sense of how **interdependent we are**, and that some things I can do... for our sake I shouldn't do.

Each of us independently is responsible for the actions and values that build up life together.

So Jesus talks about Himself as gate and sheepfold—

He speaks of the **sheepfold** of safety as this life of laying down my life for you, because Jesus did it for me and you.

We are secure, we will find rest and abundant life ONLY in a community of self-giving love.

I can't be a sheepfold of one, or a few I invite. Into Christ's sheepfold, St. Peter reminds us all are called: near, and far off.

He is the gateway because His Words and example showed us that only by going **through Him, with Him, & in Him--following** His example—do we get to where He guides us-- *whatever you need* for the abundant life of loving without self-concern, *Christ and His flock will do.*

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If that “I’m with Christ--for you” guides my actions and values, from wearing mask to supporting charities...whatever... then my masking *reveals* the Good shepherd.

But if this mask is mostly about keeping me & mine safe now or later, if economic uncertainty translates only into self-concern after the pandemic, if time *not with* friends becomes only time *in my room*, not with family, **then my being masked conceals the robber and thiee**. One who is trying to take abundant life rather than receive from only One who can invite us into it.

The sad but true thing is, during or after this pandemic, when my actions only care for me, not us, it is self I am stealing from.

Yes, life of all is less for my absence, but the Good Shepherd will make that all right in the end for those in the sheepfold. Abundant life, is life together.

That is why the Eucharist is the center of Catholic Christian Life.

Not only Communion, but the Eucharist—the Mass—is vital.

There is great good in livestream Masses and prayer online.

Hearing God’s Word is encounter with Christ. Prayer unites us to Him. But Eucharist forms us to be for others like nothing else. It is that great prayer of giving myself to Christ, so that b/c like Him, I better hear His voice, follow His lead, and let Him be the gate.

To suffer its absence to care for the more vulnerable... is St. Peter says... a grace.

The bishops of Iowa could have held public Masses this weekend. They instead led us to Christ’s example: self-sacrifice for good of flock.

They are good shepherds.

But if this time away from Eucharist is leading me to conclude: *I don’t need this greatest help of Christ to let Him be the gate to abundant life together...* Look under your mask...

I think you will find a robber and thief, stealing abundance of life from yourself that the Good shepherd wants us to have together.