

Dear Parish Family,

Sheep have an instinct to stay close together. I remember a sheep owner telling me something I'll never forget. He said that when one gets lost, it will begin to shake and shiver. It misses the closeness and the feel of the other sheep. The shepherd must bring it back to the fold.

This Sunday is sometimes referred to as Good Shepherd Sunday, the Fourth Sunday of Easter. The Gospel for this Sunday always comes to us from the tenth chapter of the Gospel according to John. Today, Jesus says, "Amen, Amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly."

Jesus is both gate and shepherd. We enter through him and we are shepherded by Him. These images are so beautiful and so tender. It reminds us that we are called to an intimate relationship with our Lord and Savior. That relationship is nurtured through prayer, the sacraments, the scriptures and the teachings of the Church. We more readily hear the call of the Good Shepherd and more readily respond to His voice.

At the same time, that relationship is nurtured in our faith community, in the Church, the Body of Christ on earth. It's nurtured through loving service to God and God's people. This is especially challenging during this pandemic.

We are able to connect with others via technology. I have to confess that, a few months ago, I hadn't even heard of Zoom. I'd used Skype a few years back, but that was it. We can connect in so many ways via technology, but we know that it's just not the same. We need the closeness to others and being in the presence of others. We need to share physical space. We do the best we can with live streaming and virtual communities, but it only goes so far. Being isolated in our homes has made us more aware of this.

There is also the danger that, in this crisis, we become more inclined to pull away from others. Technology can become more attractive than spending time with others. This was a danger before the pandemic and it may become more dangerous now. What will the "new normal" look like when we can leave social distancing behind?

To counter this, we can look to St. Peter in our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles. When asked "What are we to do?" Peter answered, "Repent." So simple and yet so powerful. "Repent."

When we honestly examine our conscience each day, we become aware of our failings. Still, we don't despair. Just as St. Peter called those around him to be baptized, we are called to heed his words in the second reading. "By his wounds, you have been healed. For you had gone astray like sheep, but you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls."

We need Christ and we need His Church. Living with others in community isn't always easy. We know that – in family life, in social gatherings, at work or in Church. But it's there that the good fight is fought. It's in the everyday challenge to love God and neighbor that the stuff of holiness is made.

By the grace of God, we pray for an end to this pandemic. Let's also continue to pray for victims and for caregivers. Once again, I would like to thank you for your generous support of our parish. Please check out our website for updates on the Church's response to this pandemic and the option for online giving. Finally, be assured of my prayers for you and your loved ones. May you all remain safe and healthy.

God bless you.

Fr. Dan Redmond