

**Homily 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday Easter 3/5/2020 Fr Dispin John St John's Mitcham Victoria Australia**  
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There is this funny story of a Bishop. I may have told this story before, but I think it is worth repeating. This Bishop, once visiting a primary school asked a group of little children, preppies. He said to them, "Little children, if you are the sheep, who am I?", expecting that the children would say that he was the shepherd as the Bishop of the diocese. But the little children did not understand him, so they were a bit confused. So he asked him again, "Little children, if you are the little sheep, who am I? One little fellow very confidently put his hand up and said, "Well, if we are the little sheep, then you are one big old sheep." This feast of Jesus as the true good shepherd couldn't have come at a better time.

We need to hear the reassuring and comforting voice of the good shepherd to strengthen us, to make us believe that he's here for us. One of the most beautiful things about the Christian story is that it is an absolutely humble human story. As a young boy growing up in India, I was used to hearing the Hindu stories or the stories of the Hindu gods from the mythologies. They're fantastic, fascinating superhero stories like - this god could pick up mountains in his hands and fly. Compare that with my Christian story, the story of Jesus being crucified. As a young boy, I must say I was not very impressed with the story of Jesus being on a cross. I needed a superhero story but today we have yet another, a humble human story.

The story of the good shepherd. Jesus' story, I believe, was very human from the very beginning, whether it was Mary and Joseph trying to find a place suitable for childbirth, but only finding a manger. And as Jesus begins his public ministry of bringing about the kingdom of God, he communicates through very ordinary human stories from the lives of the fishermen or the farmers or the shepherds as we have today. They are all reflecting the feelings, the sufferings and the day to day lives of ordinary people he encountered, touched, healed, loved and lived for. And he let his humanity be seen by others too. Like he laughed, he partied, he wept and felt the pain of being betrayed. But through his healing of the sick, feeding the hungry, forgiving the sinners, restoring the sight of the blind, he leads us to believe in his divinity, his divine presence, but only through his human person. And Jesus' journey to the cross is the ultimate expression of his humanity, real humanness. But in the past few weeks, we encounter Jesus in a powerfully human, yet divine. When his companions are locked behind closed doors, when his companions journey to Emmaus in fear and doubt, Jesus comes to them and tells them, "I love you. Do not be afraid. I am with you." It's a story of a God who chooses to journey with us. In today's first reading, Peter's speech is about God's promise of salvation. Now that promise is being fulfilled in Jesus. So we cling to that promise. We cling to that promise and our faith is based on that promise that we believe that promise is being fulfilled today. That God will continue to be with us always.

And the image of the good shepherd. Let's face it, sheep can be a bit dumb. They end up in the wrong places and in all sorts of troubles, like us maybe at times. But it is a shepherd who leads them, feeds them, guards them, and if necessary even gives his life for them. And I think that is a powerfully comforting image for us today. We end up feeling lonely at times and abandoned, feeling abandoned p. Does that mean that we did not recognize the voice of the shepherd. Because the shepherd is always there, like music in the air. Do we see the waves of music in the air with naked eyes? We can't, but does that mean there is no music in the air? If we have radio, we can tune in and capture that music, which is in the air all the time.

We need to capture the everlasting and abiding presence of Jesus all the time in our lives. When we cannot see music, it does not mean music is not there. If I'm feeling lonely, it does not mean Jesus is not there. The good shepherd is always there. All I need to do is to tune in, to pray, to have the courage to listen, to understand and believe that Jesus is there. The promise of the eternal shepherd is that this is

someone who is always present, who never abandons me, who is the gate guarding me. Am I at times forgetting that Jesus is there in our loneliness, in our struggles, in our moments of failure, in our moments of utter abandonment? Do I know that God is there? Do I know that Jesus is present? Do I believe that the good shepherd is there? And that is a challenge.

Jesus has the power to bring us back to God, to live a life of peace and joy with God always. That is the promise Peter is speaking of, that is a promise being fulfilled in Jesus, and that is the promise that continues to hold true to us even today. May the true shepherd... May the good shepherd, bless you and your families today and always, and maybe remember the good shepherd being present every day.