



Homily for 4/26/2020

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Easter in the more ancient form  
Good Shepherd Sunday

Rev. J. David Carter, JCL

Today is known as Good Shepherd Sunday because of the texts given in the propers for the Mass. We hear in the Gospel Jesus declare to the Pharisees, “I am the good Shepherd.” He juxtaposed the good shepherd with the hireling. The hireling runs away when the wolf comes because he is more concerned for his own safety rather than the sheep. This is because he does not know them. However, the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep **because** He knows them and he claims them as his own.

In this statement, “I am the good shepherd,” Jesus declares to humanity that he knows everyone he has created. This is something that may be impossible for a man. But Jesus is not simply man; He is also God who knows all things. There is not a soul that has been brought into existence that He doesn’t have a unique and special care and concern for. If we make an act of faith in this reality, what peace it brings to the heart: to rest in the knowledge that we are known intimately and individually by the Creator of all things. “I know mine,” He says. And he means it.

But the reality is that those who are His don’t always know Him as they should. This is the effect of original sin. Humanity was created in the image and likeness of God and for a special relationship with him. It was God’s very life-breath that was breathed into Adam, making him a living creature. No other created thing has this unique relationship with God. Humanity was created to walk with God and converse with him in the Garden of Eden. And that is what we did till the fall. In the sin of Adam and Eve, all humanity fell and became corrupted. Our special relationship with God was corrupted when we rebelled against our identity as beloved creatures of God. Instead of walking and conversing with God and following his Divine Will, we have rather tried to set ourselves up as our own god and to assert our own will in the place of God’s. This is the reality that St. Peter relates to us in the epistle, “For you were as sheep going astray.” Sheep go astray because they forget who their master is. Sheep on the loose always end in disaster. Humanity has gone astray from a right relationship with God. We have become disordered and we fall into many errors and pitfalls. Just look at all of recorded history. But in the fullness of time, God came to save us. This is our joy and our hope.

In Jesus Christ, God made Man, God has shown Himself to be the Good Shepherd who seeks after the lost sheep, who claims them once more as His own, and who lays down his very life so that the sheep might live. To accomplish this, He came in our human likeness and nature, taking on our own mortality, becoming like us in all things but sin. He who cannot die as God comes to redeem us by dying as Man. God has been preparing us for this redemption through His gradual revelation of Himself and His will through the Old Testament. All the Old Testament sacrifices were meant to prefigure this redeeming act of self-sacrifice of the Good Shepherd. Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac, his only begotten son, is fulfilled in God’s sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father. The Passover Lamb, sacrificed to redeem Israel’s first born, was a prefigurement of the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. The Sacrifice on the day of Atonement, when the priest entered into the Holy of Holies with the blood of bulls and goats, was meant to atone for the worship of idols like the golden calf by worship of God alone. Jesus Christ, the true High Priest of the new and everlasting covenant, enters now into the True Holy of Holies – that is, heaven – with his own innocent blood, to atone for the idolatry of man and to set right mankind’s relationship with God, so that we might no longer hide from God, but in Christ Jesus to once again have the confidence to walk with God in the restored garden of the heart and there to converse with Him. “For you were as sheep going stray: but you are now converted to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.”

But every age must be converted anew. The One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Faith that has been handed on to us, namely, that Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd come to save us, is not heard and heeded in all parts of our world – not yet. Even in our own hearts, there is division, idolatry and unbelief that must be repented of and healed. The Christian life only begins when we are redeemed by God at our baptism. But sadly, many who bear the name of Christ have stopped short of the Glory that is ours in that name. We have turned back to the world and erected new



idols and sought false gods of our own making, just like the bad kings of Israel who did not serve the Lord with whole hearts. But now we see the greatest threat to true religion. Instead of going after false gods that were thought to be above us, now we have made man the object and measure of all things instead of God. The new idol is man himself. And this new idol is earthbound and rejects the transcendent nature of humanity. It has rejected the notion that man must serve God and instead has reduced religion to the function of supposed religious things only being valuable if they serve some utilitarian purpose. There is a general dismissal of the contemplative life, and anything that doesn't serve an earthly material purpose is cast out of the "new religion". We have exalted material progress to the detriment of the true spiritual heights for which man was made, namely, to walk with God on the streets paved in gold in the New Jerusalem and to converse with Him as His beloved. We have abandoned the faith handed on to us and replaced it with a facsimile that goes by the very endearing name of humanism. Humanism sounds so good. It sounds so reasonable. It sounds so, well, humane. But the reality is that it is the ultimate false god. Humanism's creed is that man is the measure of all things. But the truth is: God is the measure of all things. This is the first Commandment: I am the Lord your God, and you shall have no other gods besides me. To love God with all your heart mind and soul is the first commandment. Until we get that right, we will never be able to truly love our neighbor as we ought. Man is only a reflection of God's glory. We bear His imprint, His image, and His likeness, but we are the mirror, not the First Being. The truth is that humans were never meant to worship humans. That is why Jesus Christ took on our humanity, that through worship of Him, our worship might be lifted up to its proper end in God the Father.

We have tried to have peace and justice without the right ordering of man to God, our ultimate end. The truth is that we cannot save ourselves. We must smash this idol and turn our hearts once again to God. I saw a post on Facebook that seems to sum this up, "Just like he did with the plagues of Egypt, God has taken away everything we worship. God said, 'you want to worship athletes, I will shut down the stadiums. You want to worship musicians, I will shut down Civic Centers. You want to worship actors, I will shut down theaters. You want to worship money, I will shut down the economy and collapse the stock market. You don't want to go to church and worship Me, I will make it where you can't go to Church.'" Now this is a wake-up call to us. But before we go any further, we must say, God does not cause evil. God did not cause the coronavirus. God did not cause the fear that has gripped the world. The world has reacted to this brokenness of the created order in the way we have because we have placed our trust in things that cannot save us. Bodily health will not save us from death in the end. So God did not cause this evil. But He does permit it and allow it to continue so that good may come of it. There is mercy and a call to repentance in all of this. We hear in Scripture, "If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14)

Jesus Christ comes as the Good Shepherd to not only redeem but to heal and restore and forgive. He knows His own. Let His own know Him too. Let us not wander from Him. Let us acknowledge Him as our God, our Savior and our Good Shepherd. Let us walk with Him in the new garden he has planted in our hearts and there converse with Him in prayer. When we bend the knee of our hearts today in this act of worship, even if at home watching online, we proclaim Christ as our God. Come, let us smash the idols in our hearts, in our families, communities, cities, nations and in this world, so that all might be in right relationship with He Who is. Come let us worship the God who saves us.