

April 25, 2021 - Fourth Sunday of Easter

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As you have probably figured out after listening to our Gospel ... this is “Good Shepherd Sunday”. ...

If we stop to think about it ... most of us ... probably find John’s metaphor of sheep just a little uncomfortable. After all ... sheep are erratic. They spend their lives milling around ... waiting to be fleeced ... or worse! Most of us would probably prefer to see ourselves more as rugged individualists. **We** ... after all ... can think ... we can reason. We are masters of our own wills and ... our intentions are pure and noble. So why liken us to sheep? Flattering or not ... we live in the **real** world ... and we **do** follow shepherds. The only question is ... which shepherd will we follow?

The world and its shepherds ... fairly scream at us ... constantly: “Buy this product!”, “Join this group!”, “Vote for ... (or against) ... him ... or her ... or this!”, “**We** have it right ... ‘**they** have it wrong!’”, “Follow **this** lifestyle!”, “Call this number ... **now!**”

There is a unending number of voices ... of the shepherds of the world ... armed with a powerful and relentless media ... each claiming ... to be the one ... the authoritative ... the true ... the valid ... **and** ... If we ... will but follow ... then happiness ... security ... excitement ... and **all** that we desire ... will be ours. And we **so** ... want to believe them ... because **all** these things seem so desirable and we ... **must** have them!

Even though ... we probably should have **learned** better ... we ... nonetheless ... from time to time ... get in line and follow. Some of their promises may even be fulfilled ... to some degree ... but **most** often ... they are not.

Now ... I am **not** saying ... that **all** the shepherds of this world are evil and dangerous ... although **many** certainly are. What I **am** saying is that ... the shepherds of this world ... will ultimately disappoint ... because at best ... **whatever** we gain by following them is fleeting and superficial.

The shepherds of the world just can’t **lead** us to where we **need** to go. The one shepherd who can ... and who will **never** disappoint is ... of course ... the one we hear in the Gospel. He tells us that if we are to be **His** sheep ... **His** flock ... we will listen **only** ... to **His** voice and follow **only** Him. **His** sheep will not **recognize** the voice of strangers. **His** sheep will not **follow** strangers. He is the **only** ... true and Good

Shepherd ... and **without** him ... we are sheep alone ... in the midst of wolves ... for our world is beset with dangers. The good shepherd will not run away like the hireling when beset with wolves or other dangers to leave the flock to their fate. The good shepherd lays down his **life** for the sheep ... as indeed ... our Good Shepherd already has!

Admittedly ... the Good Shepherd's voice can be hard to hear with all the noise coming at us from all the shepherds of the world with all their loud and constant enticements ... but the Good Shepherd **still** speaks to us and his voice can **still** be heard. He speaks to us in prayer ... when we take the time to listen. And when He commissioned His apostles and ... through them ... their successors ... He gave them **His** authority saying: "Whoever listens to you, listens to me and to the One who sent me." So even in our world ... which sadly seems to be moving farther and farther from God's ways ... the Good Shepherd's voice of truth and love can still be heard through those Apostolic successors ... the shepherds of His Holy Church.

Through His Church He also gave us the Sacraments which give us the grace ... to help us ... trust in our Good Shepherd completely ... and to follow Him unreservedly. But we are sheep ... and we are not always wise ... and sometimes we lose our focus on the Good Shepherd ... and follow other shepherds. And **when** we go astray ... those **same** Sacraments ... give **us** the grace ... "to return to the shepherd and guardian of our souls."

There is a crisis of shepherds in our world today, so we must pray for vocations and ... while we are at it ... let's not forget a prayer of thanksgiving for those shepherds who serve our church ... our diocese ... and ... especially our parish ... so very, very well and faithfully.