

Notes from the Liturgist...

Jesus, the Good Shepherd



We are now in the middle of the Easter Season, the Fourth Sunday of Easter. We read different images that describe Jesus in the Gospel of John. In the previous Sundays, we heard Jesus spoke about himself as: “I am the bread of life”, “I am the living water”, “I am the light”, “I am the way the truth and the Life” and simply “I am.” And, today we celebrate the Good Shepherd Sunday. The name of the celebration derives from the Gospel of John chapter 10. According to the Gospel, Jesus described himself as a shepherd. He said, “My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). A shepherd knows his sheep very well. There is a personal relationship between Jesus and his followers. Jesus knows each of them by name. They respond to his voice and do not follow the voice of strangers who may lead them to harm. Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd: A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). Unlike a hired hand who flees to save his life, Jesus saved his flock from the wolf even though it meant sacrificing his own life.

In the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus showed his concern and care for humanity, for all sinners. He extended his hands, and even his shoulders, to bring us back to his loving arms. He was the loving shepherd who went everywhere to search for his lost sheep, and when he found it, He carried it on his shoulders rejoicing.

Jesus entrusted to Saint Peter the responsibility of leading and caring his Church. Jesus, again, using the image of a shepherd told Saint Peter: “Feed my lambs. . . Tend my sheep. . . Feed my sheep” (John 21:15-17).

A knowledge about shepherd sheds light on the image of Jesus as shepherd. The shepherd uses a staff with a hook, which is used to guide the sheep and pull back the stray. Today Jesus guides his flock through bishops, who are known as *pastors*, the Latin for shepherds. Bishops carry staffs called crosiers. The shepherd has a rod to drive away wild animals that might harm the flock. In the same way, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, saved us from evil.

Jesus restores our souls. Shepherds feed their flocks. Jesus feeds us with the excellent bread of the Eucharist and brings us to living waters: baptism and the Holy Spirit.

Shepherds are kind, loving, patient, strong, and self-sacrificing. They are absolutely the characteristics of Jesus. And sheep, which can be stupid and foolish creature, are a fit image for us!

My dear friends, being a shepherd is not an easy task but we are called to be good shepherd to others. May we always imitate the leadership of Jesus.