

## 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter 'C' May 8, 2022 (Mother's Day)

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Acts 13: 14, 43-52 Psalm 100 Rev. 7: 9, 14-17 John 10: 27-30

There's a risk today's gospel passage presents a romanticized image of Christ. It's such a pastoral setting; imagine Jesus carrying the lost sheep on his shoulder. Outside this sanctuary at St. Bernard of Clairvaux Parish, is a mural painted on the wall of the hallway leading to our "Good Shepherd" Chapel. This mural portrays the image of Jesus "The Good Shepherd" with his flock, but has anyone else noticed how the image of Christ doesn't bear the marks of his crucifixion? This is a consoling image that gives us peace. But prominently positioned at the front of our sanctuary is a large crucifix; a contrasting image of the Christ hanging on the cross and killed in a most disgraceful manner. This image takes us back to Good Friday and the passion of Christ. Not hardly the peaceful easy feeling portrayed in today's gospel. But today's gospel does suggest a life and death situation. There's danger lurking around those verdant pastures. A ravenous wolf or prowling lion is looking for ways to snatch and scatter the sheep.

We can trust the Shepherd who laid down his life to save us. And we hear his voice calling and keeping us from danger. Our shepherd is calling and leading the **entire** flock who hear his voice. The flock is the church; made up of the people of God that through our baptisms share in the "priesthood of believers." We all have a role in the church supported and lead by the voice of the shepherd. Jesus declared himself Shepherd of a flock that hears his voice. We belong to that flock too. Through our share in the priesthood of believers we all share the responsibility for hearing God's Word and teaching it to others. Vatican II makes it clear this responsibility is not just for the hierarchy of the church and the clergy. Through the working of the Holy Spirit we have all been empowered to hear God's word and teach it to others. The sheep of this Shepherd are not passive dumb sheep, but sheep who are infused by the life that has been laid down for them. The Shepherd speaks to us in our world through modern prophets and witnesses, through those closest to us in our own households, schools and at our places of employment. If it happens that we are persecuted and expelled from

our Antiochs for witnessing to the gospel, we can shake the dust from our feet and be filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

Sheep get hungry and need food to be sustained and stay alive. Today, at this celebration, we come aside for a while to eat, to hear God's nourishing Word, the shepherd's voice, be fed and stay alive. The Shepherd speaks to us and we need to hear his voice for a sense of direction, to keep us from being lost or discouraged from our own various detours. The Shepherd wants us to see ourselves as a flock, not solitary Christians. We are a flock traveling together, but we can be distracted by so many things along the way that divide us and which cause us to evaluate each other by worldly standards. Here in the presence of the Shepherd speaking to us, we can see more clearly our true identities as followers of the same Shepherd. We see around us at this Eucharist others who have heard the voice and are trying to follow it with us.

We are hungry for food which will do more than just satisfy our bellies for a journey of a short duration. We need a food that strengthens our determination to keep following the Shepherd's voice and keep finding ways to serve, to do as he did and "lay down" our lives. The food he gives is none other than himself, the one who now joins us in the gift of ourselves in service to others. The Shepherd knows his flock and the food we need and his tender love for us endures forever. We are gathered at this Eucharist because a familiar shepherding voice has called us here. We should leave here wondering how our lives can reflect the life of the One who died for us. We have been empowered to love in the same way we have been loved. What can we do to freely lay down our lives in service for others?

It's been a few weeks since Easter and perhaps we have settled in to the ordinary 'back home' parts of our lives again. But wait, our journey is not over yet. The Shepherding Christ is not just an image, but a person who continues to offer us his guidance in our need, someone to walk with us and speak with us so we don't wander off. The Scriptures are filled with images for God and Christ that convey some reality about who God is to us and help us to understand the reality of Jesus in our lives. God is rock, liberator, ruler, creator, and father. In John's Gospel Jesus is the truth, the way, the life, bread, and living water.

The Shepherd image suggests a profound relationship: "I know my sheep and my sheep know me, in the same way that the Father knows me and I know the

Father.” There is a bond between the Shepherd and us like the bond that exists between Christ and the Father. This bond is a powerful expression of intimacy that encourages us to trust Christ in each step of the way on our journey no matter how hard it gets. This week, contemplate the intimate bond and the consoling love of our Shepherd and pray for the grace to love as God loves. Good mothers have been doing exactly this throughout the ages.