

Fourth Sunday of Easter
April 22, 2018

Shepherding

Today's gospel shares the beautiful image of a shepherd-God, loyal and protecting – quite a contrast from the passion narratives we heard only days ago. This image, soon after that of Jesus taking up his cross, brings reassurance. There is a comfort to knowing we have a shepherd-God, not one who would desert us in times of trouble, like the *hired man* who *sees a wolf and leaves the sheep and runs away*. No, ours is the Good Shepherd who knows us (*I know mine and mine know me*), who *guides us along right paths*, whose guidance and protection (*rod and staff*) brings comfort and who *lays down his life* for us to *restore our soul*.

I must confess that I prefer *lying down by still waters* to *taking up my cross*. Many of us find family life to be a bit of both – still waters that bring comfort and at times, a cross to bear. This is as it should be; all the raw materials for a deeply spiritual life, with its moments of consolation and desolation, are found in the family – not families in general, but the unique family we each find ourselves in. The sacrifice of Good Friday invites us to follow the Good Shepherd by *being* a good shepherd to those around us.

As parents, we are a good shepherd when we know, lead, guide, protect and lay down our lives for our children. This is easier when they are young (when they wear out our bodies), than when they grow older (and can wear out our hearts). Spouses too bring joy and sorrow, as do brothers and sisters and parents. No matter. Have we not broken the heart of the Good Shepherd by our own actions and inactions? We each know the answer to this. Yet our ever-loving, ever-loyal, ever-forgiving Good Shepherd welcomes us back to still waters and in so doing gives us an example of how to live the Christian life in our families, by shepherding – laying down our lives – for those we love.

Jesus, today I choose you as my Good Shepherd. I thank you for knowing, guiding, protecting and for laying down your life for me. Help me to recognize those who are a good shepherd to me at my parish, my home and everywhere I am. Restore my soul that I may live as a good shepherd for others.

Rob Sgambelluri