

4th Sunday of Easter
April 25, 2010
“Being Shepherded”

We find in all 4 Gospels, my friends, today’s image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

The One who, not only looks after His sheep, protecting them from harm, and especially from predators, but also One, who will guide them, and direct them, to the proverbial greener pastures.

He becomes so dedicated to His flock that He will even lay down His life for them, as Jesus did on the Cross for us, so that we could live life His ways, and eventually get to heaven.

All this may sound somewhat strange to our modern ears, that is unless we live on a farm and raise sheep.

Most of us don’t see ourselves as dumb animals roaming around in need of constant direction and protection.

Although, just watching the daily newscasts, just here in Erie alone, we sure do see evidence of some people doing some pretty dumb things, and who could well stand a shepherd’s kind of constant direction and protection.

Let’s be honest: some people need a police escort through life!

Yet, despite the cultural and even historic distance between this shepherding imagery and our present time, the picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd gives us some of our most beloved spiritual hopes and dreams.

Just take the words of the favorite 23rd psalm: “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want; in verdant pastures He gives me repose; beside restful waters He shall lead me,” and on and on.

Those are very comforting words at times when we most need to be consoled.

But equally important is how this image of the Church, this new organization Jesus has been setting up between Easter and Pentecost to keep alive His work here on earth, this image of the Church as a flock captures the idea of a community of followers.

It is united with a common purpose and identity.

And it is gathered together under a self-giving and protective Master.

Those who listen to the voice of Jesus will know that He is trustworthy, and that He will lead them and guide them along the right pathways in life.

So, let's think a little bit about our own need to be shepherded.

Just looking at the news out of Washington over the past several months, where there's been a lot of confusion and rancor, there has arguably been a need for some effective shepherding.

Oh, there will rarely ever be unanimity.

Even Ss. Paul and Barnabas got thrown out of Antioch in today's first reading by the dissidents.

But we Americans know that political shepherding is possible and successful because we have so many historical figures of our past whom we remember as having succeeded.

In fact, when we think about it, whether it's government, business, education, or Church, just about every human enterprise where 2 or more people are involved, there needs to be a shepherding kind of leader if things are going to get done.

Even the geese, flying overhead in the sky, choose a leader and the rest fall into a V-line behind.

Now, sometimes we see them flying in the wrong direction.

But isn't that human life too?

Our Church has the same need for Good Shepherds.

From the Lord Jesus Himself, through St. Peter and the Apostles and their successors, to Pope Benedict and all the Bishops and priests today, we have that steady and constant presence of a shepherd's guidance and protection.

It has served the Church well, all things considered, over the centuries in keeping us together as a community of disciples following Our Lord, Jesus.

A couple of weeks ago, I hope you will recall the bulletin insert that pictured all the priests who have caringly served St. Luke's and are now living in retirement.

Our second collection today is for them, and all our other Erie diocesan priests who are retired.

Some folks confuse this collection with the one we take up in December for the retired religious sister.

They are not the same.

Today's is for our retired Erie diocesan priests, including those who have baptized, married and buried a lot of our St. Luke parishioners.

And that's not to mention the confessions, First Communions, Confirmations, hospital visits and anointings, and daily and Sunday Masses as well.

So let's please be generously kind to them.

Thank you, and God bless you.