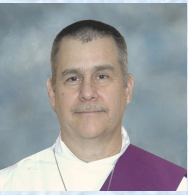


Homily Rerun: May 7, 2017 ~ Deacon Bruce



The Fourth Sunday of Easter is also known as Good Shepherd Sunday. The Gospel is always about Jesus as the Good Shepherd. It is a day the church recalls the relationship between God and His people as in the image of Shepherd and Sheep.

A shepherd is one who takes care of a herd of sheep by guarding, feeding and protecting them. In Jewish society, shepherding was known to be a very serious occupation. Sheep were kept for their wool and milk. Because of this, most sheep stayed for a very long time with their shepherd to the extent that a strong bond was established between shepherd and sheep. The shepherd often named each of the sheep, talked to them, and called them by name.

The concept of the shepherd in ancient times is of an intimate and trusting relationship. It is a traditional image the Jewish people had long held as an image of their own relationship with God. The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is well known and well-loved because of the individual care that is symbolized for each one of the flock.

Did you know that the title of parish priest, “pastor,” means shepherd? The shepherd is the one who takes the sheep to pasture. A shepherd leads, feeds, nurtures, comforts, corrects, and protects his flock – responsibilities that belong to every church leader.

Most sheep look alike, so if there are 200 sheep in a pen, how is a shepherd able to pick out just his 50 sheep? It is because of the close relationship the shepherd has with the sheep. He calls them and the sheep recognize his voice and they follow him. They will not follow another because the sheep do not recognize his voice. The sheep trust their shepherd because he cares for them. Jesus tells His followers, **“My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow Me.”** (John 10:27)

Jesus says, **“I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.”** We know about Jesus being the Good Shepherd but what is this about being the gate? The shepherds would bring the sheep down from the hills to protect them at night when the wolves and mountain lions were hunting their prey. At night, the shepherds would gather their sheep together and lead them into large pens. These sheep pens or “sheepfolds” had five foot walls made out of rocks. The shepherds would put prickly briars on top of the stone walls kind of like putting barbed wire along the top of a fence. The result was that the mountain lions and wolves couldn’t get inside the sheep pen. The door way was narrow, just one small gap in the wall.

There was no gate. The shepherd himself was the gate. At night, the shepherd would sleep in the small opening of the rock wall. He would sleep there, with his rod and staff. The meaning of this parable becomes clear when we start to think of Jesus as being the gate.

Jesus is saying to us: I am the door through which you must enter. Jesus is the gate that leads to life that is abundant, full, and rich. He is the only way through which we can enter that life. Christ is the gate that leads into the Church, which is the fold of the sheep, the flock of God.

Now there are things demanded of us, the sheep, by Jesus, the shepherd. First we must listen to his voice, listen to his instructions and then we must follow Him. The sheep does not only listen to its shepherd but follows him and his instructions. Listening to God is one thing, but following Him is another. We can listen to God without following His words.

What can we expect if we listen to Jesus and follow His instructions? He tells us that in today’s Gospel, **“I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.”** There is always abundance in the presence of Jesus: At the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11) Jesus turned the water into wine. Before the recognition of Jesus there were six empty water jars. After listening to Jesus there were jars filled to the brim - about 180 gallons worth of the best quality wine. When Jesus fed the multitude (John 6:1-71), before the recognition of the power of Jesus, there was hunger and there was a small boy with five barley loaves and two fish. After Jesus had fed the hungry – over five thousand of them, there were 12 large baskets left over. What Jesus Christ gives you and me is life. An Abundant life! A life that is overflowing. Picture a fountain that overflows again and again, bubbling over. That is the life that Jesus offers us!

In the First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Peter gets up and starts talking to the people, telling them the Good News, The Gospel says that **“they were cut to the heart.”** They look at Peter and say, “What must we do?” St. Peter told them, **“Repent and be baptized. Every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”**

When we hear the Good News *are we cut to the heart?* What must we do?

We must repent, I believe most of us are baptized already, so we must accept and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and embrace it. The gift of the Holy Spirit is always there for us, always offered to us, but we must accept and receive it. We must save ourselves from *this* corrupt generation.