

April 30, 2023
Cycle A – 4th Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

Psalm: : 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6

1 Peter 2:20b-45

John 10:1-10

Notes from Bishop Peter

THEME: JESUS IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD WHO
PROMISES TO BE WITH US ALWAYS.

A Sunday School teacher decided to have her young class memorize the Good Shepherd Psalm, #23. Unfortunately, little Rickie just couldn't remember it. On the day the kids were scheduled to recite the psalm, Ricky was very nervous so when it was his turn, he said proudly, "The Lord is my Shepherd, and that's all I need to know." And he is right! But what does it mean to say that Jesus is the Good Shepherd as we heard in today's Gospel? (John 10:1-10)

1. The people of Jesus' times were very familiar with the shepherd's role.
 - a. He is the tireless companion of his sheep. He knows them and they listen when they hear his voice. In fact when two flocks were in the same pen and a shepherd called them, those belonging to him came out. Because the shepherd loved his sheep, he cared for them as though they were close relatives or friends.
 - b. Today Jesus speaks to us in many ways: "Be careful, you are becoming too close to one of the secretaries in your office." "Be reconciled with your brother before it's too late." "Forget the temptation to embezzle money from your employer. You will be caught, embarrassed and even spend time in prison." "Don't be afraid to take that new and challenging assignment. I'll be with you." "If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts."(Psalm 95)
 - c. Jesus is the Good Shepherd because, like the shepherds of his day, he is constantly with us. As he says at the end of Matthew's Gospel, "I am with you always, until the end of the world." He is aware of our needs and of our failures because he loves us and knows our life from his own experience.
 - d. Jesus knows what human suffering and temptation are as the Letter to the Hebrews instructs us: "Jesus had to be tempted in order to become our

high priest to take away our sins. Because he was tempted and suffered, he is able to help those who suffer and are tempted.”

- e. As the Good Shepherd who loves his sheep, he always comes after those who are erring. For example a friend told me about his brother who left the church and is angry with God. I informed him that the Good Shepherd is with his brother every moment because he loves him, he understands him and his pain. Consequently he will never abandon him.
2. Interestingly, one of the earliest images of Jesus found in one of the Catacombs of Priscilla in Rome is that of the Good Shepherd who is carrying a lost sheep on his shoulders.
 - a. A problem: How does the Good Shepherd deal with the persecution of Christians from the early church to the present. Jesus didn't stop persecutions nor did his Father stop his horrible passion. Rather, he strengthened his followers and does so today so they can remain faithful just as he had. Consequently the blood of martyrs became the seedbed of the church, meaning that the church spread quickly even though people took big risks by becoming Christians.
 3. Today, the Fourth Sunday of Easter, we are asked to pray for vocations to the priesthood and for seminarians, meaning those preparing for the priesthood at various levels.
 - a. As examples of the Good Shepherd I ask that we consider Archbishop Leonard Blair, his assistant bishop Juan Miguel Betancourt and our parish priests. They take to heart our joys as well as our pain, suffering and insecurity in these most challenging and difficult times.
 - b. Priests are mediators between God and humans so they intercede for their people so that they might grow in the likeness of Jesus who promises to give us life and life in abundance. Most if not all priests are good shepherds and foot-washers in the image of Jesus himself.
 4. Now we enter into the Eucharistic part of our Mass. It is Jesus the Good Shepherd who loves us and who will never abandon us and it is Jesus who sends us bishops and priests and deacons to represent him in that role. May he send us many more who will dedicate themselves to serve as he did, with love and concern for their people.

Amen.