

Homily Fifth Sunday of Easter 2018 – April 29, 2018

A shepherd was looking after his sheep one day on the side of a deserted road. Suddenly a brand new Porsche screeches to a halt. The driver, a man dressed in an Armani suit, Gucci shoes, Ray Ban sunglasses, a Rolex watch, gets out and asks the shepherd:

“If I can tell you how many sheep you have, will you give me one of them?” The shepherd looks at the young man, and then looks at the large flock of grazing sheep and replies: “Okay”.

The young man parks the car, connects his laptop to his mobile, enters a NASA Webster, scans the ground using his GPS, opens a database, with 60 Excel tables, filled with logarithms and pivotal tables and then prints out a 150 page report on his high tech printer.

He turns to the shepherd and says: “You have exactly one thousand seven hundred and sixteen sheep here.” Rather surprised the shepherd replies, “That’s correct, you can have your sheep.”

The young man takes an animal puts it in his back of his Porsche.

Just as the man is about to drive off, the shepherd asks him:

“If I guess your profession, will you return my animal to me?” The young man answers, “Yes, why not”?

The shepherd says “You are an IT consultant.”

“How did you know?” asks the young man?”

“Very simple”, answers the shepherd.

“Firstly you came here without being called.

Secondly you charged me a fee to tell me something I already knew, and

Thirdly, you don’t understand anything about my business.

Now please can I have my dog back?”

Most of us here probably don’t know the first thing about the sheep business. And we probably did not deal with a shepherd this week. But we more than likely met some sheep.

We humans have similarities to sheep. Starting with the person you see in the mirror each morning. How so?

First: Sheep are passive. Did you ever hear of a sports team having sheep for a mascot? Can you imagine rooting..... not for the Carolina Football Panthers...but The Carolina Sheep?

We humans too can be passive. Especially in the face of moral problems, in emotional challenges, and most especially in our relationship with God.

Second: sheep are dumb. They don’t think of the consequences of their behavior. A frightened sheep will often walk right off the edge of a cliff. It is said that on a cold night sheep will pile on top of one another to stay warm, the sheep at the bottom of the heap often will suffocate.

Yes sheep have a reputation for doing dumb things. We humans often do dumb things, make dumb choices. We learn behavior has consequences.

Third: when a sheep trusts someone, it follows without thinking. In November 1978 in the Jonestown tragedy in Guyana, 900 followers of a cult leader named Jim Jones, committed suicide.....simply on the say so of their leader.

Or consider ISIS and the modern day terrorist. He listens to a leader who has distorted the teachings of Islam. He straps a bomb to himself and becomes a suicide bomber, all on the word of a crazed leader.

It is crucial that we find a leader, a shepherd, we can trust. Jesus fits that bill. He will sometimes confuse us, but Jesus will never lie to us, never exploit us.

What characteristics do we see in Jesus as a Good shepherd. Well first I used to think that the phrase "Good Shepherd".... meant nice, kind heartedbut Jesus is saying "I am the excellent shepherd."

Jesus is claiming to be The Pavarotti, Mozart, Sebastian Bach, or to use a sports image, the Henry Aaron, Tom Brady, Lebron James of shepherds.

To drive the point home Jesus says "I know my own sheep and they know me." I know my sheep, their diseases, their fears, their dreams, and joys.

Jesus tells about a shepherd that has 100 sheep and one of them is missing, what did he do? Did he write that sheep off as a slight economic loss. No! He left the other 99 grazing and went off to find the one that was lost. And when he found it he came home rejoicing.

Also did you know in Jesus time, the shepherd often lay across the entrance to the pen where the sheep slept. He acted as the door. When Jesus said " I am the door of the Sheepfold" this is exactly what he meant. It was the shepherd who regulated who came in and who went out.

There is spiritual safety when we allow the Good Shepherd to be the door that regulates our lives. Dark thoughts can't gain entrance. Addictions can't come in. Favorite sins are turned away. Disorders are not welcomed. Allowing the Good Shepherd at the door of our lives, we stay spiritually safe.

We sheep entered the sheep pen this morning. We found our place. Not everyone here knows your name. But the Good shepherd saw you knows you... As we came into the pen, He scanned each one of us.

He watched and said there's Bill and Mary, John and Barbara, Kelly and Ken. He observed "look at that emotional bruise I need to take care of that."

He said: "Here comes Mamma sheep with her baby lambs ...boy she looks tired...I'll give her some rest beside still water. And here comes that big old daddy ram. He has been butting heads lately, he needs some green pasture...maybe one with 18 holes...

He said " Someone made a nasty comment to this one, cut open an old wound.....beneath the skin..... here is some salve for that."

One final bit of sheep-ology. It has been said sheep will not drink from running water, they will only drink, and be refreshed from still water.

"Be still and know that I am God" says Psalm 46. So why don't we silence our thoughts,like sheepishly remain still....allowing Jesus the Good Shepherd to refresh us?