

4th Sunday of Easter/ Vocation Sunday, (4/28/2021).

Texts:

First Reading. Acts. 4:8-12.

Second Reading. 1 John. 3:1-2.

Third Reading. John. 10:11-18.

Theme: *I am the good shepherd" (Vocation Sunday)*

Congregation: *St. Joseph of the Valley- St. Lawrence Parish, Easton/Kansas.*

1. Daily Life:

I saw a film sometime ago. It was about the life of a shepherd. He had quite a large herd of sheep, but he seemed to know each one. As he walked about on the paths, he talked with his friend about this one and that one. He knew the character and habits of every sheep. It was most interesting the way he was explaining how this one is always the first to drink; how that one was the fighting one; how that one likes to wander away as soon as he turns his head, etc.

As the film continued, we saw the shepherd coming one evening. As he looked at every animal entering the compound, he noticed that the little naughty one who like to wander about had, in fact, not returned with the others. The face of the shepherd became very worried. He counted and checked again the whole herd, but that one was missing. He closed the gate of the place where the sheep were kept at night-time and left again.

It was dark by now and he was tired after the whole day on the road with the flock. But he could not rest without that missing sheep. It had been raining that day, it was slippery on slope of the hill and he fell a few times. He climbed down the hill, listening to see if he could hear the sheep bleating. Not a sound. He was now in the valley, he went here and there, behind the rocks, near the river. After a while, he heard a soft sound.

He ran, his cloth got caught up in a bush. He freed himself but the cloth was torn. Then, he came to a place where there was a deep hole surrounded by thorn bushes; there the sheep had fallen and could not climb up again. It was very difficult for him to get hold of the sheep. His hands were getting scratched by the thorns and were bleeding. But he managed to reach the trembling sheep. He put it on his shoulders. In the dark, you could hear the whistling of the happy shepherd who found his wandering sheep.

2. God's Message:

As the film ended, in my mind, I could picture another shepherd- the One whom we have heard in today's gospel saying about Himself:

"I am the good shepherd". Yes, this is what Jesus tell us about Himself. During His life, people wanted to know who he was. At times, they ask directly: "Tell us who you are". He did from time to time. Today is such a day he speaks about Himself. And, as He tells us who he is, he tells us, about ourselves too. What did He say in the gospel?

First, He says that we belong to Him. He is not a hired man, He Himself is the shepherd and the sheep belong to Him. In our world, there are people who suffer a lot because they say: "they do not belong' anywhere. There are orphans who live in homes that are not their own. There refugees who live in a country that is not their country. There are sick and old people in hospitals, who feel they are where they should be, where they belong. To belong somehow means to be at home, to share with people who are dear to us. To be accepted for what we are, and loved as we are.

This is what Jesus does for us: we are His. He accepts us for what we are. He loves us as we are. To be with him is to be "at home", in security, at peace. Then he adds that: "a hired man has no concern for the sheep", But He is not a hired man. He is full of concern for everyone in His flock.

Our friends are dear to us. They are people we often talk about. We rely on them. We admire their qualities. We call on their talents and abilities when we are in need. We trust them. We, take pleasure in all they bring into our lives. We enjoy being with them, working together or just talking away about so many things. If you think for moment: what is it in your own friends that make them so important to you? Is it not this: that they really care for you? They are truly concerned about what happens to you.

Jesus is our very special Friend, and He cares for us better than any of our closest friends can do. His concern reaches every part of our lives. It surrounds us. Whatever happens to us, he is touched by it.

He goes on to say: "I know my own and my own know me". Like the shepherd in the film I saw, and better still, Jesus knows everyone of us as we are. Our good qualities and our weaknesses. Our abilities and our limitations. The good in us and what is not so good. Our efforts at being what he wants us to be, and sometimes our laziness. He sees the depth our hearts. He knows when we are happy or sad. When things go well, or when we are struggling with difficulties. He knows us, yes, but more still He understands us.

He says that we also know Him. Here we can stop for a moment and ask ourselves: "How well do I know Him? What do I know of Him? Do I try to know more about Him? Do I make special efforts to find out what He expects from me in this or that situation?"

Jesus adds: "I lay down my life for sheep". This is something so great that we have difficulties in understanding it. Jesus gives, His own life for us.

The shepherd in the film gave himself much trouble to find the sheep. Even though he was tired, he left again. It was dark, but he went just the same. He searched for a long while, tore his cloth, hurt his hands. But it was as if all that did not matter. Only one thing mattered: to find the sheep. He himself was ready to suffer so that his sheep might be safe.

Jesus has done so much more for you and for me. He has given His own life. He has suffered terrible suffering, so that we may be saved. Because of our sins, like a wandering sheep, we had gone away from God. We had followed our own path. The shepherd was showing one way and we were going in the opposite direction. And of course, we found ourselves caught in all kinds of painful situations. He came to fetch us, and all those who were not with him.

He leads us all. At times, we are not sure which way to go. We are faced with choices. We have to take decisions. It is not clear to us what is best. If we turn to Him, the Good Shepherd, He will show us the way.

But there is one thing we need to do. It is to listen to His voice. This is what He expects from us. We, must pay attention to where He wants to take us. In the film, the shepherd was listening, trying to hear if the sheep was calling. Jesus is always listening to us when we call to Him. But do we listen to Him calling to us?

He does call to us, in the depth of our hearts, in the words of a sermon, perhaps, through a book, or the good example of a friend. He calls gently, softly... Do you recognize His voice?... Do you recognize Him as your Good Shepherd?

3. New Life:

Some of you may have, at home, a picture of the Good Shepherd. During this coming week, it would be a good idea if you put that picture in a place where you can come together, at night, and pray as a family.

Bring to the Good Shepherd your joys of the day, and your problems as well. Confide to Him the people who live in your house, and those who come to visit you. Ask Him for what you are in need of, and tell Him that you want to follow Him faithfully. And if, at one time or another, you find you have wandered away from Him, pray in the words of the Bible, saying: "I am wandering like a lost sheep, and look for servant" (Psalm.119:176). He will surely hear your voice and answer you.