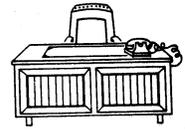


4th Sunday of Easter

April 25, 2021



From the Desk of
Fr. Romanus

Dear Parishioners,

Sunday Reflection:

This Sunday's gospel from John strikes a familiar tone with the narrative of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. In John's gospel, Jesus revealed his identity through the "I am" utterances. There are seven of these utterances. Namely: "I am the Bread of Life" (Jn. 6:35); "I am the Light of the world" (Jn. 8:12); "I am the Gate" (Jn. 10:9); "I am the Good Shepherd" (Jn. 10:14); "I am the Resurrection *and* Life" (Jn. 11:25); "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn. 14:6); "I am the True Vine" (Jn. 15:1). In the burning bush, God revealed himself to Moses as "I AM" (Ex. 3:14).

These sayings reveal the varied ways God provides for and safeguards his people. After experiencing the Holy Week and Triduum celebrations, it is not difficult to understand the image of Christ as the Good Shepherd. These celebrations highlight God's unconditional love revealed through his Son. They go to show how far God was willing to go for human redemption.

In today's gospel, Jesus compares the Good Shepherd with a hired hand. When wild beasts threaten, the Good Shepherd stands his ground to protect his flock. This often involves putting himself in harm's way, even to the point of sacrificing his life for the flock. On the other hand, a hired hand who has no investment in the flock abandons it and runs away when danger threatens. For him, the flock is not worth sacrificing his life.

The books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel contain condemnations of the bad shepherds of Israel – "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture" (Jer. 23:1). Under the leadership of bad shepherds, the sheep scatter and become prey to wild beasts. Rather than care for the flock, bad shepherds fatten themselves at their expense. This is typical of human shepherds in the ordinary sense where the flock is simply a means of livelihood. Due to the inability of the shepherds of Israel to care for the flock, God Himself took over the role of shepherding (Ezek. 34:7-11). It was an indictment of self-centered shepherding.

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus laid down his life for his flock as evident in our Good Friday service. Jesus reminds us that he laid down his life without coercion in order to pick it up again (the resurrection). Hence, the dying and rising of Christ manifest the supreme power of God and reveal a God who is always in control of destiny. One of the hallmarks of the Good Shepherd is the close bond he has with the flock. The Church helps to nourish that bond through the administration of the sacraments. A flock's survival is also dependent on its willingness to cooperate with the shepherd and follow where the shepherd leads. A flock that follows its own designs will hardly survive.

In the gospel, Jesus refers to other sheep that also depend on him for leadership and guidance. This recognition is important in establishing common grounds for Christian unity and inter-religious dialogue. The recognition that Catholicism is not the only path to salvation was one of the major accomplishments of the Second Vatican Council. Ultimately, the goal is to have one flock and one shepherd. Hence, the importance of continuous prayer for Christian unity.

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus is the model of Christian leadership. We exercise leadership roles as parents, guardians, teachers, catechists, ministers, sponsors, et cetera. As Christian leaders, we have a responsibility to protect those entrusted to us. This is especially true in relation to the children entrusted to our care. We have to do everything to ensure their protection from abuse and danger. As we know, April is child protection month, when the Church places extra emphasis on the protection of children from abuse. Are we doing enough to ensure that those under our protection are safe?

Have a great week!

Fr. Romanus