

Connecting With the Sunday Readings

Fourth Sunday of Easter

One of the most treasured descriptions of Jesus is that he is the Good Shepherd. Christian artists have often portrayed Jesus as carrying the lost sheep or being among the sheep with a caring look on his face. With Jesus being the human face of God among us, we look at the Good Shepherd as a reminder of God's constant presence and care for all of us. Sometimes we forget about God's goodness (we all have difficult days), so the Church regularly reminds us of this image of Jesus. Most likely, Jesus witnessed the actions of good shepherds in his day and saw this as a fitting way of pointing to his own ministry to all of us.

A Gospel Word for the Home

John 10:11-18

A shepherd's life was a watchful, caring one. The shepherd had to be continually on guard for those who might steal his sheep. He had to constantly be vigilant that the sheep did not wander off and lose their way. As the Gospel mentions, there is also the danger of wolves. Shepherding was a dangerous twenty-four-hour job. So dangerous that the good shepherd might even have to lay down his life for his sheep. Of course, this is exactly what Jesus did for us.

We must be careful that we don't turn Jesus into an easy-going; everything is just fine kind of person. His life was very difficult, especially toward the end. There is a hard edge to his life, like that of a Good Shepherd. Why is this important for us to know? It's important to know because our lives can also be quite difficult at times. Anyone who devotes himself or herself to the care of others steps into the arena of a demanding life. And caring for others constitutes the core of family life. There are financial difficulties and the everyday challenges of getting along. Those who care for aging parents or for disadvantaged children know all too well the "burden" of family life. Just like Jesus, in family we can all be good shepherds for each other.

Thought for the Week

Have you ever wondered whether sheep are fearful? They might be. After all, they do not seem very aggressive or powerful. We even associate meekness with sheep or lambs. Today's Gospel reading suggests that for their survival, sheep need good caretakers who will protect them from whatever enemies might be around. Their world is filled with dangers but they need not be afraid. They are well cared for.

The same applies to us. We live in a dangerous world, a world filled with uncertainties. But Jesus calls us to not be afraid. "Fear not" is one of the most common phrases in the Gospels. Given the presence of all kinds of forces that may lead us to fear, it's good to know that we are cared for by God. Stress brought about by fear is widespread. Stress cannot only cause all kinds of health problems; it can drain us of enthusiasm and joy in life. This is not what God wants. Let the Good Shepherd enter our lives and provide us with peace within.

—by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

Parent Survival

Sometimes it's good for us to step back and see the big picture of our lives. In today's Gospel reading we come across important parts of that picture. We are encouraged to put it all together like a jigsaw puzzle. Jesus gives us encouragement by noting from the beginning that all the pieces fit together. He first notes that he and the Father are perfectly connected. The same is true with Jesus and us. We are connected, too. Yet while everything fits together, it's no easy task to finish the puzzle. It's difficult, very difficult. Look at the hard life of the good shepherd. Look at the difficulties faced by parents, sometimes daily. Not easy, but we live in the hope that in the end, it will all fall into place.

Parents need words of encouragement and understanding. They need hope that it will all be okay because God in the end is in charge. We will be safe and we will be part of God's flock. So will our children and all those close to us. Jesus wants us to feel his care and concern for our well-being. The Good Shepherd does not abandon his sheep.

Car or Meal Talk

Make a list of the fears faced by each member of the family. Be sure that the children know what their parents fear, too. Then talk about how we might rely on God's help to lessen our fears.

One-Line Prayer

Good Shepherd, keep an eye on us and protect us from all that might hurt our family. Amen.