

Sunday April 25th, 2021, The Fourth Sunday of Easter

Good Morning from St. Bernadette's.

I hope everyone is keeping safe and well, and following all the guidance we receive to overcome these strange times, and continuing to pray for all our needs at this time.

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday, with our Lord telling us in John 10:11-18, 'I am the good shepherd the good shepherd is one who lays down his life of his sheep...I know my own and my own know me.' I always think that the title Good Shepherd should be so celebrated in England, fitting in, as it does, with all sorts of wonderful English pastoral imagery. In the beautiful passage from St. John Jesus makes it clear that the role of the shepherd, is to look after the sheep, to love and care for them, guide them and protect them. And while this is a wonderful picture of Christ as the Good Shepherd, it really does only tells half the story, particularly when you consider the role of the shepherd in New Testament Palestine.

At the time of Jesus being a shepherd was to be a shunned person, someone who was looked down upon by the rest of the society, separated as they were from the towns and unable to always practice their faith in the socially accepted ways. And being a shepherd was also a dangerous job; life in the hills was difficult, and both sheep and shepherds themselves were constantly under the very real threat of wild animals. And this is how Jesus spoke of himself.

In speaking of himself in this way, as a shepherd, Christ was not only emphasising his caring, gentle guiding, love for the Church. He was also speaking of the dangers and the death that he himself was prepared to face for us – dangers and death he was prepared to face for us, as he makes clear: out of his own free will, out of love for us, in obedience to his Father, so that we might follow him, listen to him, and be one with him.

If the little England, cosy image of the gentle shepherd is somewhat removed, then, from the reality of the Good Shepherd, it is perhaps worth examining the reality of our Christian lives and how we live as followers of this Shepherd. It is very easy for our Christianity and our practice of the faith to be something cosy and familiar, something not threatening, that is so easy and easy-going that it is also easy to be ignored, having little effect on our own day to day lives, and even less on the lives of those around us. As all the readings today ultimately state, being a Christian is dangerous, is difficult, is to be 'not known' by the world. Or it should be. The frequently heard suggestions that the Church should 'move with the times' or make its teachings more 'socially acceptable' is the dangerous temptation to water down the truth so that it becomes, perhaps more acceptable, but ultimately meaningless, or to

paraphrase St. John, to be known by the world, but not known by God. To suggest that Christian teaching should follow the ways of society rather than encourage the world to follow Christ is to suggest that the shepherd should in fact be one of the sheep, and ultimately leave us scattered and leaderless like, well, like lost sheep.

The image of the Good Shepherd is, primarily, one of a loving, caring man, seeking to look after his flock and lead them to the truth. And that is a most wonderful and beautiful image to hold before us. But we should never forget what the Good Shepherd had to endure to share and live out that truth with us. Nor should we ever stop trying our hardest to live out those truths in the world today ourselves.

*O God,
Shepherd of all your people,
deliver us from all troubles,
worries and cares that assail us,
that we may always do
what is pleasing in your sight,
and remain safe
in the care of our Good Shepherd,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

And what else could we sing this morning other than ‘The Lord’s My Shepherd’.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHQoRfFr1rE> As ever Eileen has helpfully provided us with a scene reflecting that ‘There are other sheep not of this fold,’ hence the different varieties of sheep in the picture.

It is also tradition on Good Shepherd Sunday to pray a prayer for Vocation to the priesthood, the religious life, and the active laity. Let’s do so:

Lord, You told us ‘The harvest indeed is great but the laborers are few. Pray, therefore, the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into His harvest.’

We ask You to strengthen us as we follow the vocation to which You have called us. We pray particularly for those called to serve as priests in the Archdiocese of St. John's.

We pray for those called to serve as sisters, brothers and deacons. Father we pray for those whom You have called, those You are calling now, and those You will call in the future. May they be open and responsive to the call of serving your people.

We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

So! A shepherd owned a remarkable dog, deft at sheep herding and able to speak. At the end of the day, after his dog had herded the flock into the pen, the shepherd asked his canine friend to confirm

how many sheep were in. '40,' the dog barked. '40? I counted 37,' said the shepherd. 'Yes,' replied the dog, 'I rounded them up.'

A shepherd is tending to his flock of sheep when suddenly one of them goes running off. The shepherd goes looking for it and after the entire day of frolicking, the sheep comes up to the shepherd and says, 'I'm ready to go back with the sheep now'. And so the shepherd takes her back to the sheep. The next day the same thing happens. The sheep runs off and after spending the whole day looking for her, the sheep comes up to him near dusk, tugs on his pants and says, 'I'm ready to go back'. The shepherd stands there for a second not responding so the sheep says a second time 'take me back to my fellow sheep'. And so the shepherd leads her back. The third day the sheep AGAIN runs from the flock and once again the shepherd gives chase. This time when the sheep comes back it says, 'I'm ready to go back to the flock now'. Again it says 'I'm ready to go back! Let's go!'. The shepherd seems not to be listening so finally the sheep bleats out 'HEY, LET'S GO. TAKE ME BACK TO THE FLOCK!' The shepherd replies 'No need to shout! I herded you the first two times!'

I'll get my coat.

Y'all have a great Sunday!

Once again many thanks for all your return mails. Apologies if I don't reply immediately, sometimes they seem to get lost (or kind of bunched up). Any suggestions for ways to keep our faith and spirits up at this time are most welcome!

And remember, St. Bernadette's is not closed. We're just doing things differently for a while, until we are allowed to gather together once more, more stronger, more faithful, more loving, more creative, and more grateful for the amazing community that is St. Bernadette's.

With love and faith in Jesus.

Fr. P.