

4th Sunday of Easter: Yr. B – 2021
[Acts 4:8-12; 1 Jn 3:1-2; Jn 10:11-18]

Jesus called himself the “Good Shepherd,” but what makes him good?

First, a shepherd warns us about stranger danger. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, but we must watch out for those hired shepherds who won’t lay down their life for ours and predators like wolves. Jesus said, *“I know mine and mine know me ... and they will hear my voice.”* St. Ignatius of Loyola, the father of spiritual direction, teaches us to listen only for the voice of Jesus the Good Shepherd. We are being called closer or further away from God by two opposite voices. The Good Spirit, the Holy Spirit, arouses our conscience when we are not doing God’s will and brings peace and joy when we are. The evil spirit, be it the world, the Evil One and even our self, proposes apparent pleasures in choosing sin, it also saddens us and places obstacles to doing God’s will.

Second, a shepherd feeds us by leading us to green pastures. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, said, *“I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.”* He feeds us in the gift of Holy Communion. When Jesus told his Apostles at the Last Supper, *“This is my body,” “This is my blood,”* under the appearance of simple bread and wine, He was miraculously making the infinite God palatable to us finite humans. Both the Cross and the Eucharist make it abundantly clear that God the Father has no greater gift to give us than His son, Jesus.

Third, a shepherd enhances the life of his flock. Jesus said, *“I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.”* Our faith is not about saying ‘no’ to everything, but rather it is about the greater ‘yes’ to God’s plan for our life so that we can become the best version of ourself. Every manufacturer sends instructions with their product to make it perform well and achieve longevity. If I ignore the instructions to put gasoline, and not diesel, into my car, or to change the oil, I should not expect my car to run well or at all! The same holds true for our soul. If we value any relationship it comes with the obligations to communicate, to be generous, to be available and vulnerable, and to follow certain rules. Why would we expect fruitful results in our relationship with Jesus if we do less with Him than our friends?

Lastly, the good shepherd wants unity among His flock. Jesus said, *“There will be one flock, one shepherd.”* It is hard to shepherd two or more groups going in different directions. Every kindergarten teacher knows that shepherding the little ones is like herding cats. We are more mature than that in our spiritual life. If Jesus prayed before His Ascension that we be one, and St. Paul said Jesus is the head and we are parts of one body, why is there so much division among us? We know it is not healthy on a societal level, but how about our divisions on a spiritual level? That’s why the more we do in common across the various Christian denominations brings healing and peace to the Body of Christ and our community. Our shared charitable outreach, communal concerts, and melting pot of souls at Holy Spirit School are vital to spreading our common goal of salvation through Jesus Christ. Peter said in our first reading, *“[Jesus] is the stone rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved.”* The cornerstone is the most important stone in the building because it locks a structure together. Without Christ the structure will crumble.

Apart from Jesus we are like sheep without a shepherd, without pasture, without protection, and without a purpose. For St. Bernard of Clairvaux said, *“Write what you will, I shall not relish it unless it tells of Jesus. Talk or argue about what you will, I shall not relish it if you exclude the name of Jesus. Jesus to me is honey in the mouth, music in the ear, [and] a song in my heart.”*