

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Year A

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

Ps 23: 13a, 3b4, 5, 6

I Pt 2:20b-25

Jn 10:1-10

“The Good Shepherd”

George F. Riley, O.S.A.

Today’s Gospel speaks about Penance and what is Penance for all of us, but the simple fact of The Good Shepherd calling all the sinners of humanity back to union with Himself.

Most of us do not know that the term “Pastor” of which there are 167 in the Diocese of Camden, is only the Latin word for Shepherd. But then again, all of us today live in a world of dull, dead, and accepted cliches such as right on, super, foxy, groovy, and boo mod cod. Next month at many a June commencement throughout the land, you will hear a good deal about sheepskins from the people who rarely see a flock of sheep and never see a shepherd.

That is why Christ took the term “shepherd” as His symbol when He declared that “I am the Good Shepherd”. It was a picture. It was a lesson. It was a symbol for all ages. In the Bible, is not the term “sheep” the first animal to be mentioned by name? If we were to have a roll call of the VIP’s of B.C., that is the towering figures of the Old Testament, it almost sounds like a convention of shepherds.

Abel, the first man to die on earth was a shepherd. Moses was minding his sheep when he saw the burning bush and God Himself. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and Joseph were all shepherds. Shepherds are men who are quiet, vigilant, alert and devoted, as space age Christians should be.

So it is with majestic simplicity that our Savior said “I am the Good Shepherd”. And then He said “The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.” That is why we see the rich meaning of Easter as watching the Shepherd of Nazareth climb the Hill of Calvary, searching for the lost sheep of the world. Then with bleeding hands, He carried a saved world, into the sheepcote of Heaven.

If any of you get depressed and dejected at times about your sins of the past, or are distrustful of God’s mercy here in the present, you should remember the great portrait that Christ, not Rembrandt nor Holbein, left of Himself. That picture is that of a Lord that so loved the sinner, that He would leave His 99 sheep to go after the one who strayed. This is not necessarily the black sheep from the beginning, but He especially cares for the White sheep who through human frailty and frivolity slips’ and becomes soiled in the mud of the world. This is how He wants us to remember Him... as the Good Shepherd.

Again in the Temple of Jerusalem, the sheep was the chief animal of sacrifice offered to the Old Testament God in atonement for sin. That is why the first time that John the Baptist saw Christ on the water’s edge, he shouted out in awe...”Behold the Lamb of God.” That is, behold the sacrifice of the New Testament that will be offered to the Almighty for the sins of the world. We today can say behold the Shepherd of Men, who seeks us out of the brambles and briars of our own stupidity, liquidity and especially cupidity.

The Good Shepherd said “I know mind and mine know me.” The shepherd of the Old Testament before Christ, had a distinctive flute to call his sheep. The sheep knew their master’s

particular personal tune as well as they knew their own cloven feet. In the New Testament it is Christ, our Shepherd who calls us in His own unmistakable sound with the thin, small voice of conscience. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread and fools that we all are sometimes pay the call of Christ no heed. Almost like foolish sheep with the impetuosity of passion, the green flowers of money, the red bushes of brute power. Suddenly we find ourselves plunging down the precipice and soon lying at the bottom, broken, bleeding, bruised and buried.

Today is the time to think of the Good Shepherd who walks in those out of the way places to search out sad cases, wounded souls, spirits of dust, and poor pieces of wrecked humanity. All those stray seek, to carry them back to penance and peace of mind and soul.

Penance is therefore an Easter gift. A gift of peace and joy, a gift climaxing a visit from Christ which had begun with the greetings "Pax Vobis." Peace to You. Pardon and peace. A peace of mind the world cannot give.

If by God's grace you happen to be one of the few who have not strayed, then pray for your brothers and sisters. Pray to Mary to intercede. Why Mary? Well, in the Grotto of Bethlehem, shepherds were her first guests. In the Grotto of Lourdes, it was to a shepherdess that she appeared as the Immaculate Conception. It was on the Hill of Fatima that three children saw her while they were minding their sheep. Like all women, she rules the world. She can melt the marble heart, bend the iron will and bring even the most hopeless and denigrated back to the security, the serenity, the sweetness and the solemnity of the sacramental life of the Church. That church which is but one big flock and of which her Son is the Shepherd. The Good Shepherd. Mary had a little lamb. She gave Him up to save us all.