

## **GOOD SHEPHERD SUNDAY – May 3, 2020**

**First Reading: Acts 2:14, 36-41**

**Psalm 23**

**Second Reading: 1 Peter 2:20-25**

**Gospel Reading: John 10:1-10**

**A reading from the Holy Gospel according to John**

**Jesus said,**

**“The truth of the matter is,**

**whoever does not enter the sheepfold through the gate**

**but climbs in some other way**

**is a thief and a robber.**

**The one who enters through the gate**

**is shepherd of the sheep,**

**the one for whom the keeper opens the gate.**

**The sheep know the shepherd’s voice;**

**the shepherd calls them by name and**

**leads them out.**

**Having led them out of the fold,**

**the shepherd walks in front of them**

**and they follow**

**because they recognize the shepherd’s voice.**

**They simply will not follow strangers ---**

**they will flee from them**

**because they do not recognize the voice of strangers.”**

**Even though Jesus used this metaphor with them, they did not grasp what he was trying to tell them. He therefore said to them again,**

**“The truth of the matter is, I am the sheep gate**

**All who came before me were thieves and marauders**

**whom the sheep did not heed.**

**I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be safe ---**

**You will go in and out and find pasture.**

**The thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy.**

**I came that you might have life, and have it to the full.”**

**The Good News of Salvation!**

**R. Glory and praise to our Savior Jesus Christ!**

The quarantine that we are experiencing has made our pet Labrador Annie happier by the day. We are with her most all the time now to walk more, throw balls, and go to the off leash dog park. Going to the dog park for Annie is like Christmas morning for a little kid. She whines all the way over in the car since she knows the way. Once we are there, she leaps out of the car and runs and runs in her pasture. She gets into groups of other dogs and will fetch the ball until she almost drops. This park is a big one of 70 acres. Sometimes she strays away from us in her enthusiasm for exploring, but whenever we call her name she comes

back to us. I know that if there were a thousand dogs there, she would come when we called her. She knows our voices, she trusts and loves us – we are her pack. She knows we would never harm her. Ours is a relationship of pure and simple love.

On this Good Shepherd Sunday, I feel my experience with my pet is a good metaphor for the caring relationship we have with our beloved shepherd Jesus. We know that the shepherd is the one who takes care of sheep, usually in flocks in the fields. References to sheep in the Bible occur over five hundred times. A shepherd tends the sheep, guides and guards the sheep, provides food and protection and care for the sheep. Shepherding is one of the oldest professions, beginning some ten thousand years ago in Asia Minor. Sheep represent the chief wealth and the total livelihood of pastoral peoples.

It's important to recognize that in the Bible the nature of sheep is presented as affectionate, unaggressive, relatively defenseless, and in constant need of care and supervision. The sheep and the shepherd are bound in a relationship that is powerful and moving. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, our psalm for the day, is an example of this relationship, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."

In Isaiah, God is spoken of as a shepherd, including the female aspect, "...for he will gather the lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young." We, as shepherds who follow Jesus, must follow this example. We must care for those most vulnerable in our society, and those who don't have a shepherd.

There are seven "I Am" statements that Jesus makes in the gospels. Today we hear, "I am the Door of the Sheep."

This door or gate to the shelter of the safe enclosure for the sheep is the one through which Jesus takes the sheep in and out. As they go out they are led by the shepherd during the day to the safety of green pastures. As they return by night they are led back into the security of the shelter.

We Christians follow the same path of following Jesus, the one we follow and trust. It's in the context of relationship that Jesus is the gate, the gate that leads to new life. We walk through the gate, even though we don't have it all figured out, because we trust in Jesus. We know he is worth trusting, even if we're not sure where the path is leading. We don't know where the path is leading during this pandemic. Those who follow Jesus must follow him in the dark valleys as well as to the refreshing streams. They must be willing to give up some of their own plans and entrust themselves to his leadership.

The twenty third psalm for today is one that is well known and well loved. I find great comfort in praying it now in this time of pandemic. "Even though I walk in the dark valley, I fear no evil; for you are at my side with your rod and staff that give me courage." Father Mike Joncas who penned "On Eagle's Wings", composed another hymn in late March of this year in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The text is a paraphrase of Psalm 23, "The Lord is My Shepherd." The song may be used and reproduced for one year provided the copyright notice remains intact. It can be downloaded on GodSongs.net. I want to share the lyrics with you to pray. Many performances are available on YouTube by typing in "Shelter Me" Joncas.

### **Shelter Me**

- 1. Shepherd and sheep, my God and I: to fresh green fields you led my steps in days gone by.  
You gave me rest by quiet springs and filled my soul with peace your loving presence brings.**

**Chorus:**

**O shelter me, O shelter me: the way ahead is dark and difficult to see.**

**O shelter me, O shelter me:**

**All will be well if only you will shelter me.**

**2. Yet now I tread a diff'rent way; death dogs my path with stealthy steps from day to day.**

**I cannot find your peaceful place but dwell in dreary darkness, longing for your face.**

**3. I will look back in days to come and realize your faithfulness has led me home.**

**Within your house I'll find my peace, trusting that in your mercy you have sheltered me.**

I pray that all of us will know and feel the comfort and protection of our Good Shepherd Jesus who offers us shelter. I suggest that all of us go out of our way to reach out to anyone we know who is alone, sick, or needs help during the pandemic. Make a call, send a text or a card. Remind another that "you are loved." Be a sheltering shepherd to others just as you desire to be sheltered.

Thoughts to ponder-

Who do you shepherd?

Who shepherds you?

What is the "open door/gate" that Jesus is inviting you to go through at this present time?