

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
April 22, 2018

*Good Shepherd Sunday*

Readings: Acts 4:8-12; 1 John 3:1-2; John 10:11-18

As surprising as it may seem, sometimes seminarians are not always kind to one another, especially in the early 1980's when there was so much debate about the direction of the Church following Vatican II. I say this because I once had heard via the grapevine that some seminarians described me as a 'wolf in sheep's clothing'. To be honest, at age 19, I was unsure of the meaning of the phrase! Was this a compliment about strength of my character? No, it was not!

In those days, everyone was checking out everyone else. Where do you stand on this issue or that? In retrospect, perhaps I was guilty of the same thing. So when some seminary brothers seemed to question the sincerity of my convictions, it was a wake up call.

This weekend, traditionally called "Good Shepherd Sunday," calls each of us to a deeper sense of authenticity to live our faith, to truly lead others to Christ. The Shepherd guards the sheep from the ravenous wolves that would seek to harm them. The image of a spiritual leader as shepherd is one of the most profound images in the Church. Not in the sense that a priest herds his flocks, but certainly in that he cares for the flock, he watches over and guards.

There is a beautiful early 5<sup>th</sup> century mosaic in a mausoleum in Ravenna Italy depicting the scene of Christ the Good Shepherd. The small brick chapel is extremely plain on the outside, concealing the glittering treasures inside. The burial site was designed for a woman named *Galla Placidia*, daughter of an Emperor and regent for another until he reached the age of majority. The image of the Good Shepherd was common in the Roman catacombs of earlier centuries, but there are important developments to be seen in this version.

Instead of being depicted as a countryside shepherd, Jesus is clothed in a royal purple mantle over a golden tunic, holding a tall cross with his left hand. A golden halo surrounds his face. Rather than

carrying a lamb over his shoulders, he sits amongst his flock. On either side of him are two groups of three sheep, who look peaceful and gaze up at their Shepherd. Christ tenderly touches the nose of one of them with his left hand.<sup>1</sup>

Each of us has a yearning to love others and to be loved. To be a shepherd is an honor, not in any haughty sense, but in the most treasured way possible. To be in a position to nourish, to lead and guide is a tremendous responsibility, but a joyous one beyond description. It is also one in which our shortcomings are all too known to ourselves, as to others. It is humbling in every respect.

The role of a shepherd in the Church today is modeled first by the chief pastor of the Church, our Holy Father. Locally, the role falls to our Bishop, and to the parish pastor in communion with him. No pastor would want to be thought of as a wolf in sheep's clothing. Are we flawed? Of course we are. At times are we ineffective? Most certainly we are. Your patience and forgiveness goes a long way.

To be afforded the opportunity to serve others is a profound experience of union with Christ, the model for pastors. To be lifted up in prayer by the good people is itself a tremendous comfort, and for all of us to pray for our own Shepherd, Archbishop Hebda, as we do at each Mass, situates our place in the wider Church.

With Christ as our model, let each of us attend to those people entrusted to our care, treating them tenderly and lovingly, just as Jesus demonstrated by his life and ministry.

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<sup>1</sup> c. 425 AD, Mosaic at Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna

