

Fourth Sunday of Easter 2020

My beloved ones, in the earlier calendar before the Novus Ordo, (the present form of the Liturgy in the Church), these readings were assigned to the 2nd Sunday after Easter, which was called: Good Shepherd Sunday. The Sunday readings teach us about a fundamental quality in which Jesus relates to each of us; however, if we are going to understand what He is teaching us, then we need to understand the images that He uses in His two parables today!

The first image is that of a shepherd carrying a lamb around his shoulders. At the time of Jesus and even today, (in many poor areas of the Middle East and Africa), sheep were essential to the welfare of the family, for milk, cheese, clothing, and only very rarely- for food. Thus, each lamb was precious and essential. Sheep were amongst the first domesticated animals, and they have been so bred, that they have become radically dependent upon human beings, (even to help in their delivery at birth). Thus, when a lamb was born which was skittish or afraid and would stray away from the shepherd, (thus endangering the welfare of the entire herd), the shepherd would carry the lamb around his neck, sometimes for a couple of weeks, thus bonding the little lamb to himself.

Jesus uses this image to teach us how important we are to His family's welfare; and, how important and bonded we are to Him! This image of Jesus has always been one of my favorite images; for it teaches us how infinitely precious we are to Him! We belong to Him, and He will spare no effort in order to bear us upon His very person! He constantly guards us so that we will not stray far from His protection and guidance!

The second image that Jesus uses is the gate of the sheepfold. The flock of sheep needed both protection and nourishment. The sheepfold was constructed out of Acacia thorn bushes, which have long, sharp thorns. An entry way was provided on one side of the circle, wherein the shepherd would sleep in the entry way with a fire lit close by, thus discouraging wild animals, (lions and jackals and wolves still roamed in Israel during the time of Jesus). The smell of a human being and the fire, would keep them at bay. When the day would finally dawn, the shepherd

would lead out his flock to green pastures that had not been previously grazed, and to fresh water to water his flock.

Obviously, this image recalls the wonderful and comforting images of Psalm 23: “The Lord is my Shepherd, and nothing shall I want...” When Jesus says to us: “I am the gate...”, He is telling us that He wants to be everything to us and for us, our protection and our provider.

People are becoming more and more unsettled and even angry over this long shut-down of our normal, everyday lives. People are angry at bishops and priests, (even some pundits suggesting they are cowards and slackers, for simply trying to provide for the welfare of our beloved people); but, the efforts of bishops and priests are for the common good, for which we are responsible as the appointed shepherds of God’s beloved flock. Jesus is calling all of His flock today, to remember His infinitely extraordinary love and care for each of us. He reminds us that we were deliberately created by Him for this time, and He will protect us from the wolf at the gate. He reminds us that our welfare is in His hands, and He will never abandon us, ever! He reminds us that He carries each of us on His shoulder, because He first carries us in His heart. And, He reminds us that He has called His bishops and priests to do the same!

While I and Fr. Heston cannot take away the strain and suffering of this time, it is important for you to know, that we carry you in our hearts and minds, always! After the end of the day, when I close the Church after my third Holy Hour, I fetch the doggies, (Australian Shepherds!) and drive up above the city to pray an additional Rosary for your beloved ones, our parish family and our community! At every mass, Fr. Heston and I remember you and lift you up in our sacrifice to the Father in Jesus, on your behalf. All of us are bearing this burden, we are all being threatened by the wolf at the gate, but none of you is forgotten, each of you is important and essential to the plan of God!

P.S.: Driving about, and shopping for groceries, I have noticed more and more people becoming cavalier about social distancing and masks. Fewer are taking this plague seriously—please take it seriously! It is especially dangerous for at risk people and highly infectious. The greatest number of infections are now taking

place between asymptomatic people and those at risk! Keep social distance, wear a mask, and sanitize!