

HOMILY ~ FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER APRIL 20/21, 2024

There was a ten year old little girl who got up in church to recite Psalm 23 by heart; and this is what she said, *“The Lord is my shepherd, that’s all I want.”* Well, she did not quite get the words right, but she got the theology correct. The Lord is all we really need and all that we want. The image of the Good Shepherd was a good image to be used at the time, but we are less knowledgeable about shepherding today.

Raising sheep was a central part of economic life in the Middle East at that time. It was kind of like the auto industry in Detroit today. They had flocks of thousands at that time, and the shepherd could make or break the flock. The shepherd spent his days herding the sheep because they were not fenced in. The shepherd slept with the sheep at night in a tent where he slept in the opening so he could protect the sheep. Fighting off bears, wolves and thieves was in their job description, so the good shepherd did risk his life for his sheep. The shepherd was with the sheep 24 hours a day. The shepherd knew his sheep, and his sheep knew him. Sometimes two or more flocks would get intermingled when they were drinking by a brook. All the sheep look alike so you would wonder how they would sort them out. The shepherd calls out to the sheep, they recognize his voice and only his sheep follow him.

The image of the Good Shepherd is a good one for Jesus. He laid down his life for us. He wanders around with us all day. He sleeps with us at night. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows every hair on our heads. Hopefully, we know Jesus and we follow him. Sometimes we can get distracted by what our culture says we should follow: money, power, pleasure and fame. But if we wander off, Jesus is going to follow us and coax us back.

Today is **“Good Shepherd Sunday”** and **“World Day of Prayer for Priestly Vocations,”** so please pray for priestly vocations today. The Archdiocese wants me to preach about vocations to the priesthood, so that is what I am going to do. This image of the Good Shepherd is frequently used to

describe the priesthood. I certainly am not the shepherd that Jesus is, but I think there are some comparisons. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. I do not think I will be called to lay down my life, but I have laid down parts of my life. There is the whole celibacy thing. I will never be married or have children or grandchildren, and that is a sacrifice. But I look at some of my married friends, and they have sacrificed being single. I think being married is really hard. Having long term relationships is very difficult, and I think many couples go through years of their lives when they are not very happy. Then there are children. They are all different, and they do not come with a set of instructions. You have to figure it out as you go along. Being a parent is a whole lifetime commitment of work. I think grandchildren can be a joy, but I see many grandparents working really hard to care for their grandchildren. Parents and grandparents are laying down parts of their lives for their children and grandchildren every day. Between celibacy and married life, I think the real question is, *“What are you willing to lay down your life for?”*

A priest needs to know his flock, and his flock needs to him. I have been in a number of parishes over the years, and each one of them has a different culture. I have to wander with my flock. Someone told me one time, *“Fr. Jim, you always get what you want because you are the pastor.”* Well, I am the pastor; but I frequently do not get what I want. I frequently have to make difficult decisions, and it always comes down to what is good for the Parish or what is good for our School. I am not a hired hand doing this for money. I have never made less money in my life. I am here because I am dedicated to St. Edith Parish and St. Edith School. I am not running away when there is trouble. My decisions do not always please everyone. When you leave here, I hope you remember your flock and where you need to come back to. I do not want to lose any of you.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim