

Good Shepherd Sunday

Homily Given by Fr. Gabriel Scasino, OFM Conv.

April 26, 2015 – (4th Sunday of Easter)

Today, Good Shepherd Sunday, we are presented with yet another beautiful image of who Jesus is for us: namely, a good shepherd. But what does that mean, especially in a culture where the vast majority of us have little to no experience working with sheep? Likewise, we live in a culture that ranges from apathetic to hostile towards those among us trying to shepherd.

You see, in today's Gospel, the imagery of Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, is both beautiful and messy. When Jesus likens himself to a shepherd, his culture immediately understood. Each night, after herding the sheep in, the shepherd would literally lay down his life and protect his sheep from any harm. He would lay at the gate, at the only entrance/exit in or out of the sheepfold. He would lay right at the threshold, on the dirt and mud, under the stars of the sky, amidst the chilly night air. Certainly not a glorious job and much less a comfortable one, yet this is how our God comes to us and desires to be with us.

We all can learn something from this. Our God never seeks to be higher than us; instead, he always lowers himself to serve and protect us. How much more then should we do the same for others? Sadly, as mentioned before, we live in a world, or at least a culture, that is anywhere from apathetic to antagonistic regarding those who serve and protect. My mind turns immediately to the police these days. The media would have us believe that all police, everywhere, are crooks with ulterior motives. We know that is not so. Similarly, in the 90s and early 2000s, the media had us believe that all priests were corrupt child predators. Again, not true. Certainly and sadly, amongst all and any groups, there are some who are "hired hands whose sheep are not his own and they are abandoned and left to the wolves."

A good shepherd follows the example of Jesus and is willing to get dirty, muddy, and lay down his own life. Today's image is a perfect reminder to parents. You may not have to lay down at the threshold of your front door – or at least I hope you don't – but you *may* have to get muddied when trying to shepherd your children. I often hear people say, "I would never want to be a teenager today." I say, I would never want to be a parent today! How incredibly challenging it is to protect your sheep from the wolves of the world. Far too many times, the wolves dress in sheep's clothing and use delicate and polite language which, on the outside appears harmless, but ultimately is ravaging our dear sheep.

I can't help but think of how silent the Western World is regarding the slaughtering of our own. Right now, across the globe, the persecution of our brothers and sisters is happening, but we hear little about it on the news; and even fewer words from the international community; and nothing from our current administration. As a bishop of Cameroon stated, "The massacre that happened in Paris happens here daily...yet nobody in the world says anything about it." The U.S. has been all "a buzz" about Bruce Jenner, the former track star becoming a woman, but have we forgotten or do we even know about the 14 year old boy who was set on fire in India because he revealed he was a Christian? Do we hear about the total lies and deception of Planned Parenthood who uses your tax dollars to perform millions of abortions under the guise of women's reproductive health? There are many who say that they what wants best for you and for your children, but few of those who say that they are willing to get muddy and lay down their lives. Even fewer still are those who speak the unpopular truth.

The unpopular truth...this is what led me to my vocation. Growing up in a very broken home where drugs and divorce seemed like easy escapes for my parents, it was the *spoken* truth, *my* truth of the reality of the hell of it that I confessed to my aunt and grandmother one day. They, like good shepherds, made sure to provide me with stability, love, and a consistent home with rules and boundaries. It was then that my vocation began to emerge. Prior to this, I really had a nominal relationship with God and an even weaker relationship with the Church. I thought that the Church was just a bunch of hypocrites with all these dumb rules to follow. Little did I know that the Good Shepherd was already with me in my messy, muddied life.

In Middle School, I became very good friends with a girl named Andrea. She was full of life. She was happy. I was unhappy and cautious. It was through this friendship that I was invited back to the Church. I will never forget how moving it was to attend Holy Thursday Mass – the washing of the feet, the stripping of the altar, the empty tabernacle...all these things moved my heart. I wanted to know more. Why do we do these things and what does it all mean? Not to mention, learning how to say the Rosary and what Eucharistic Adoration was. I was finally beginning to learn the truths of my faith...why hadn't I heard it before? Why hadn't anyone told me of the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist?

In time, I fell in love with God. I got involved in my parish, taught Faith Formation, and went on retreats. I began to feel a tug at my heart that maybe God was asking me to become a priest. I talked to people I trusted about this feeling and eventually wrote to the Vocation Director of the Franciscans. I figured, I would only know if I gave it a try. And I did. May you young people here today – may you think about it. Maybe God is asking *you* to join the religious life or to become a priest. You will never know until you talk to people you trust; you will never know unless you ask. It's a beautiful life, a happy life. It certainly isn't a glamorous life and not even a popular life, but it is a life of purpose at the service of God and of his Church. May each of us today follow the voice of the Good Shepherd.