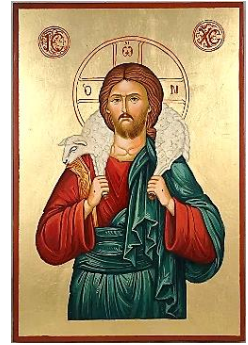


# Our Lady of the Airways Parish

Fourth Sunday of Easter, 2020



Dear Friends in Christ,

*“The sheep follow him because they know his voice” (John 10:4).*

As we reach the midpoint of our Easter season, the Church shifts our focus away from the post-resurrection accounts of Our Lord and directs it towards the image of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. The image of the Good Shepherd traditionally depicts Jesus returning to the sheepfold with an injured, strayed sheep gently placed on His shoulder.

It can be easy for many of us who live in the western world to perhaps undervalue, unappreciated, or even trivialize the significance of the shepherd image. It was, however, a familiar and well-known one during ancient times. In the Jewish civilization, the image resonated with the people since the profession of shepherding was common. Many notable biblical figures, such as Abraham, Moses and David, were actual shepherds. There also existed in the Old Testament a biblical concept that portrayed God as the Shepherd of Israel, the one who governed his chosen people through kings, judges, and priests.

Our Gospel from St. John the Evangelist begins with Jesus’ words, *“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs it by another way is a thief and a bandit.”* These words were intended for the false shepherds of Israel. He calls them *“thieves and bandits,”* because they had treacherously gained entry to the flock in order *“...to steal and kill and destroy.”* These leaders, including the Scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ time, miserably failed in carrying out their mission: by placing their needs before the well-being of the people; by spreading disorder and fear; by leading them astray with false teachings, etc. Sadly, our own Catholic Church has not been spared from the painful effects of bad shepherding. Throughout the centuries, a number of churchmen - wolves under the guise of being shepherd of souls - have caused untold, irreparable pain and suffering towards the people of God, because of their selfish and sinful actions.

In contrast to all these false and inauthentic shepherds, Jesus identifies Himself as the Good Shepherd. He says, *“Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.... Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.”* Jesus is the Saviour. He came into the world with the mission to seek the salvation of the sheep, and to lead them into the pasture of eternal life.

In addition to the figure of the Good Shepherd, today’s Gospel provides us with a description of what an authentic sheep looks like. Our Lord highlights three behavioural traits or characteristics common to all those who belong to His sheepfold: *His sheep are called by name; His sheep belong to Him and refuse to follow the voice of strangers; His sheep hear His voice and follow Him.* Let us explore and personally reflect upon these traits.

***“His sheep are called by name....”*** It has been said that, “Names are deeply important to human beings, a crucial way of understanding not just the world around us, but each other.” The Catechism also states, “God calls each one by name. Everyone’s name is sacred. The name is the icon of the person. It demands respect as a sign of the dignity of the one who bears it (2158). God beautifully ratifies this reality through the words of the prophet of Isaiah: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.” Jesus, the Good Shepherd, calls each person by name, into a personal, intimate relationship with Him. Are we attentive to His voice when He calls us?

***“His sheep belong to Him and refuse to follow the voice of strangers....”*** One of the first acts that takes place in the Rite of Baptism is the tracing of the sign of the cross on the forehead of the child/catechumen before Baptism. By virtue of this simple act, the soul becomes the special possession of the Lord. We belong to the Lord! To belong to Christ means to imitate Him in our every day life - to live, love, and suffer in Him, with Him and through Him. It means that we reject the temptation to follow another. Are we listening to the voice of God within our lives?

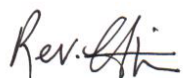
***“His sheep hear his voice and follow him....”*** Today, there exist many people who foolishly believe that they do not need a shepherd. This inherent desire to direct oneself, runs very deep within us. This should not surprise us, given that we inherited this tendency from our first parents. The original sin of Adam and Eve, their act of disobedience, was a desire to assert their own will at the expense of rejecting the precept of God. Are we letting Jesus guide us in our journey to Him?

In his first encyclical, Redeemer of Man, Saint John Paul II wrote, *Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it. This, as has already been said, is why Christ the Redeemer “fully reveals man to himself.”* Are we allowing Jesus to “go ahead of [us]” so that we can follow him?

Let us do all we can to ensure that we possess these traits. Jesus is true Shepherd and Pastor of our souls. This profound reality is captured by today’s psalm:

*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
He leads me beside still waters;  
He restores my soul....  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
my whole life long.”*

Yours in Christ,



Fr. Thomas Lim