

GOOD SHEPHERD SUNDAY HOMILY

Deacon Jack Miller

John 10:11-18

April 29, 2012

Today, Jesus tells us that He is the Good Shepherd, but it is important to remember that Jesus is the Lamb of God, following His Father Shepherd in heaven. This is an important reality as we assess the relationship Jesus is calling us to in this gospel.

You might think that the relationship between a shepherd and his flock is pretty simple: The shepherd leads and the flock follows—but there's much more to it than that.

In Jesus' day, the shepherd would rise in the early morning and lead the flock from the fold, marching at its head to the spot where the sheep were to be pastured. There he'd watch them all day, taking care that none of the sheep strayed. If any wandered away, he'd seek diligently until he found them and bring them back.

Back then sheep had to be supplied regularly with water, and the shepherd had to guide them either to some running stream or dig wells for them in the wilderness. At night he led the flock home to the fold, counting them as they passed under the rod at the door to be sure that none were missing. If any were missing, he risked his life to find them and bring them home. Then, he had to guard the fold through the night from the attack of wild animals or thieves. That was if he was a conscientious shepherd.

And even if he was that good shepherd, few liked or respected him because his was a dirty, stinking job. In Jesus' case, it was a job that only He was equipped to do.

Jesus tells us today that if the sheep belong to the shepherd, odds are **that** shepherd will take better care of those sheep than if he's just paid to watch them. It's the difference between a parent and a babysitter. The parent will take a bullet for his or her child, the babysitter will call 9-1-1. If I were a lamb...I'd want to BELONG a good shepherd...and I'd CHOOSE to follow him-wouldn't you?

Every day we, and those we love, in some form or other, are invited to follow a shepherd. Maybe it's a drug pusher, smut seller, face lifter, weight reduction huckster, clique leader, body building guru, get-rich-quick promoter, and one of my favorites: hair transplant specialist...vying for our attention. If we choose to follow one of them, **our relationship is about what's best for them, not what's best for us.**

As Jesus explains in our gospel today, relationships are about love, and love is about serving others. A good shepherd worries about his sheep for no other reason than that he loves them. Jesus uses that image to convey the degree of love His Father has for Him and that they have for each of us. It is a relationship based on trust and obedience.

So the question we're asked today is: who or what do we follow?

Do we follow Jesus, or the PAID Shepherd? Do we follow the money-- or do we follow the love? Perhaps more importantly, do we just **follow** Jesus the Good Shepherd, or do we become a shepherd and help lead others to Christ?

By becoming human, Jesus was able to be both a shepherd and a lamb and show us that we can and should be both as well. That's what the Incarnation was all about.

As the Chosen People prayed for a powerful king who would judge the world, God sent a helpless infant to save it. Like a baby lamb he was born in a stable and laid in a manger and those dirty, stinking shepherds were the first to welcome Him to the world.

When Jesus grew to adulthood, HE shepherded fisherman, tax collectors, tent makers, prostitutes and an assortment of sinners, people just like us. After He was crucified as the Lamb of God to take away our sins, God raised Him from the dead to lead us to salvation as our GOOD Shepherd.

This wasn't accomplished by conquering armies-- but by the love and mercy of an all-forgiving God. Since Jesus' time, world powers have come and gone, but a line of 265 shepherds have succeeded Peter, that first shepherd appointed by Jesus to head His Church. That Church, mind you, instituted by someone who didn't even travel 100 miles during His lifetime, today has more than a billion members and continues to proclaim the **Good News** despite two thousand years of challenges and persecution.

Like Christ, each of us is called to be a shepherd and a lamb. Responding to that call begins by following our Good Shepherd...because, if the Lord is our Shepherd there is nothing we will want. Even if we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, **we will fear no evil**, and goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our life; and we shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. So we graciously ask: Shepherd us O God, beyond our wants, beyond our fears, from death into life.