

II EASTER 2017

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

1 ST PETER 2.19 ST. JOHN 10.11



Sheep...author and church pastor Gary Richmond confesses...are not his favorite animals. But they must be God's...sheep and shepherds are mentioned more than 500 times in Holy Scripture.

His book *All God's Creatures: Spiritual Lessons from the Animals of the Bible*, chronicles the years he spent as a zookeeper and veterinary assistant at the Los Angeles Zoo. And he has a lot to say about sheep.

Zookeepers considered caring for sheep punishment, when there were more exotic animals to care for. The only value Pastor Richmond noticed in sheep was their willingness to subject themselves to endless hours of attention by children...and they never retaliated.

Sheep need a lot of care and supervision...the shepherd has a 24/7 job. God is our Shepherd...he never sleeps...that's a good thing. Sheep are compelled by mob instinct...when one sheep panics they all do. The whole flock can easily go the wrong way. Sometimes we do the same thing...Isaiah wrote, "All of us are like sheep that were lost, each of us going his own way."

Sheep get easily frightened. On one occasion another person's fear almost cost Pastor Richmond his life. A black leopard almost escaped from its cage and clawed his right hand. The curator for mammals who was supposed to help him ran for her life leaving him and a senior veterinarian to fend for themselves. The cage was secured and no one else got hurt. Perhaps taking care of sheep isn't such a bad thing after all.

In their natural environment sheep get dirty. Sheepskin produces lanolin, which coats the wool. This helps keep the sheep warm in the winter, but it makes the wool an attractant to dirt, pollen and anything else the sheep comes into contact with. Sheep stay dirty until the shepherd cleans them...its the same with us...Jesus is the shepherd who came to get us clean...he is the Good Shepherd who was willing to die for his sheep.

Sheep are often called one of the least intelligent of God's creatures. That's not entirely true. Sheep are able to recognize human faces and voices and remember them for years. With a lot of hard work sheep will learn their names, and come to the zookeeper or farmer when they are called.

We don't think of ourselves as sheep...it's clear from Holy Scripture God thinks we are...and we always have his attention! Jeremiah wrote we are like sheep, which have gotten lost and can't find our way home. God spoke to Ezekiel and told him he himself would go looking for his sheep to take care of them and bring them together again.

A farmer who has a flock of sheep will do everything possible to keep the sheep safe and out of harms way. The people he hires to take care of the sheep have less of an investment in the sheep. If times get rough they could just quit. They could just get a job at the next farm down the road, perhaps with a better pension plan. The safety of the sheep and the farm's success are not their primary concerns.

Jesus is more than just a shepherd/farmer with a financial investment in sheep. He has an investment in our souls. He is the **GOOD SHEPHERD**, who was willing to give up his life for the sheep he loves. He is the Good Shepherd who comes looking for us when we get lost, when we wander off and get ourselves into trouble, when we let our lives get messy and cut ourselves off from his love. Jesus never gives up on us.

John the Baptist calls Jesus the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the whole world...who gives us his life-giving Body and Blood. Jesus the Good Shepherd calls us by our names to come back to him, where we are safe and secure from harm. He knows us and we know him and respond. We don't need to stay lost and confused.

We no longer have to be like sheep wandering off and getting into trouble. Messy lives can be put back in order. We can turn around and come back to Jesus the Good Shepherd and Keeper of our souls.

