II Easter 2021
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
I Peter 2.19-25   St. John 10.11-16
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Shepherds take care of their sheep. Good shepherds love their sheep...they are willing to take risks to keep them safe. Jesus is THE Good Shepherd…there is no other Shepherd like him. He does exactly what God told Ezekiel he himself would do…he comes looking for us when we wander off and get lost.

One of the most compelling images of Jesus is the icon of The Good Shepherd...Jesus carrying a lamb over his shoulders...back to the safety and security of the sheep pen and the rest of the flock. The lamb Jesus is carrying...is us!

Perhaps the most famous passage about the shepherd and his sheep is Psalm 23...in Robert Alter's newer translation it reads..."The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...Your road and Your staff---it is they that console me."

Also in Mr Alter's translation of Psalm 95...which is familiar to us as the *Venite* at Morning Prayer...we read..."For he is our God and we are the people he tends and the flock of his hand."

Most of us have seen sheep...usually in a sanitized environment like a zoo or farm that caters to visitors. They are sheared and clean and the little lambs will let you pet them. The sheep feel safe...as long as they are in their sheep pen...away from animals that might hurt them.

Isaiah wrote people are like sheep about to be sheared. Sheep have to be sheared for their own good. Wool becomes saturated with the lanolin sheepskin produces. The wool attracts dirt and anything else that stick to it. If the sheep isn't sheared...the wool becomes too heavy...the sheep will fall down and suffocate under it's own weight and die.

Sheep are also not too smart...they don't make good leaders. Left on their own...away from the shepherd who takes care of them...they will run at the first sign of trouble. A lamb left on it's own...will cry for help from it's mother...it's a cry that says, "Come and rescue me from the mess I've gotten myself into."

Sheep may not be too smart but they do possess some level of intelligence. They can recognize their shepherd by sight...they can detect his scent...and most importantly...they respond to his call...and only his call. They know in the sound of their shepherd's voice...who often calls them by their names...they will find the safety they can't find on their own.

People are not sheep but sometimes we act like them. We sometimes run off in different directions without thinking about the consequences of our actions. We are sometimes swayed by the prevailing opinions of the world in which we live...which is frequently at odds with what we know to be true about our Faith. Isaiah wrote, "All of us were like sheep that were lost, each of us going his own way."

A farmer who hires someone to watch over his sheep can only hope that person will value (love) his sheep as much as he does. That's not always the case. The hired person sees watching the sheep as a job...a means to a paycheck. When trouble comes...he has no vested interest in the sheep...he will save himself.

Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd, who is willing to die for his sheep. He is not like any other shepherd...he did not save himself when things got really bad. Jesus the Good Shepherd...is also the Sacrificial Lamb of Good Friday who takes away the sin of the World. He is...as the hymn we just sang tells us...both victim and priest. And today and at every Mass he invites us to celebrate by receiving his Body and Blood.

Jesus tells us the Father knows him and he knows the Father. Jesus knows us and we know him. He says this about the sheep he loves..."There are other sheep which belong to me that are not in this sheep pen. I must bring them too; they will listen to my voice, and they will become one flock with one shepherd."

Peter reminds us that we WERE like sheep that had lost our way, but we have been brought back to follow the Shepherd and Keeper of our souls. To get back home...where we are safe in the care of Jesus the Good Shepherd who loves us…we just have to respond to his call.
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