

II Easter 2023

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

I Peter 2.19-25 St. John 10.11-16



What Does It Mean to Be a Sheep...from the Animal's Point of View......the title of an April 2014 article published by the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources Department.

Here are some interesting facts about sheep...

*...They are very social animals and most comfortable within in a flock,
...They are uneasy when outside the flock,
...They are timid animals and inclined to flee danger when a perceived threat enters their "personal space",
...They have the ability to learn and remember faces of other sheep and shepherds, even when shown a photograph,
...They know the shepherds voice and will come to him when he calls them.*

The shepherd is the first profession mentioned in the Bible. Able, Moses, Abraham, Jacob and the patriarchs of the Twelve Tribes of Israel were all shepherds. King David wrote about the good shepherd in what is perhaps one of the most well known passages in the Bible...Psalm 23.

In the Gospel, Jesus identifies himself as the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23. He is not just a shepherd...he THE Good Shepherd, who is willing to die for his sheep. The hired help has no vested interest in the sheep. When they see danger coming...they run off. They don't care about the sheep.

The mark of a true and good shepherd is just how far is he willing to go to protect his sheep. A good shepherd will do everything he can to keep his flock safe. He is willing to make sacrifices...even his own life...to rescue sheep who have wandered off...and bring them back to the safety of the flock.

People are not sheep, but we share some of the characteristic behavior of sheep, especially in our spiritual lives. We have a tendency to wander off and get lost. We let sin invade our "personal space". We forget to pray and ask for God's help. We're looking for the Good Shepherd to find us and lead us back home.

Most of us live in urban environments. We aren't farmers and probably don't spend a lot of time thinking about sheep or shepherds. We are different from sheep because we don't act with pure instinct. We have the free will God gave us to make decisions...to do right or wrong.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who does not leave us alone and wandering without help. He comes looking for us. He is our God...and in Psalm 95 we proclaim...

...“We are the people he tends and the flock of His hand.” (Robert Alter Translation)

In the Parable of the Lost Sheep, it is Jesus who is happy when he brings the lost and wandering sheep back to the flock. Luke writes...

...“There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine respectable people who do not need to repent.”

Peter wasn't a shepherd but he would learn what it meant to be one. Jesus asked Peter to take care of his sheep...he was committing to Peter and the other Apostles...and to the bishops and priests following them...the love and care of the Church...God's people.

When a man is ordained priest, the bishop says to the man about to be ordained...

...“Have always therefore printed in your remembrance, how great a treasure is committed to your charge. For they are the sheep of Christ...”

And when a man is about to be consecrated bishop, the Presiding Bishop says to him...

...“Be to the flock of Christ a shepherd, not a wolf; feed them, devour them not. Hold up the weak, heal the sick, bind up the broken, bring again the outcasts, seek the lost.”

What Does It Mean to Be a Sheep...from our point of view? Our friend Peter has the answer...

...“We were like sheep that had lost their way, but now we have been brought back to follow the Shepherd and CBishop of our souls”.

