

II Easter 2025

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

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*1 Peter 2.19-25 St. John 10.11-16*



Sheep need someone to take care of them. Sheep are some of the most defenseless animals on Earth. They prefer to be in a flock rather than alone. They can experience stress and anxiety when separated from the flock. They are at the most risk when they are alone...easy prey for wolves.

Sheep seem to know there is safety in numbers. When frightened they will run away from the threat. They try to stay with the flock...but they can get lost...alone and separated from their sheep friends. Sheep...need a shepherd to take care of them.

Throughout the Old Testament, God is portrayed as a shepherd watching over his people, Israel. He protects them and defends them; he cares for them and nurtures them; he provides for them and sustains them; and he restores them and heals them. He does this directly or through the judges, kings and prophets he commissions to be shepherds on his behalf. Some were good shepherds; others were not.

800 years before the birth of Christ, Isaiah wrote, "The Sovereign Lord...will take care of his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs together and carry them in his arms; he will gently lead their mothers. (Isaiah 40.9) In Psalm 95, "He is our God; we are the people he cares for, the flock for which he provides." (Psalm 95.7)

David was a shepherd and Psalm 23 is written from his point of view...that of a shepherd..."The Lord is my Shepherd; I have everything I need. He lets me rest in fields of green grass and leads me by quiet pools of fresh water." Even if I go through the deepest darkness, I will not be afraid, Lord, for you are with me. Your shepherd's rod and staff protect me." (Psalm 23.1-2, 4)

John the Baptist called Jesus "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1.29) and in Revelation, Jesus in the Lamb "who is in the center of the throne, will be our shepherd, and he will guide us to springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe away every tear from our eyes." (Revelation 7.17)

When a man is consecrated bishop, he is given a Bible and in the Exhortation that follows, he is told to “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 in again the outcasts, seek the lost. Be so merciful, that you be not too remiss; so minister discipline, that you forget not mercy.” A bishop’s crozier is the “shepherd’s rod and staff” of Psalm 23 and a symbol of his commitment to follow the example of Peter and the Apostles to take care of the sheep. We are the sheep.

We call today “Good Shepherd Sunday” because of the shepherd images in both the Epistle and Gospel readings. In the Gospel, Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd...not just a shepherd...THE Good Shepherd...who is willing to die for his sheep. The farmer who takes care of his sheep and loves them will stop at nothing to keep his flock safe. A good farmer will go looking for a lost sheep to bring it back safely. One of his workers might not go looking for the lost sheep. He has no vested interest in the flock. It’s just another job.

We are the sheep who follow Jesus...and like the sheep in the sheep pen, we can sometimes lose our way. We can get lost in a hostile world full of wolves and can’t find our way back home...to Jesus. There is, of course, a big difference between sheep and people. Sheep act on instinct...we have the free will God has given us...to stay lost or follow Jesus back home.

God has given us shepherds to watch over us. Peter seems like the least likely character Jesus would choose to be a shepherd to take care of his Church. He told Peter if he really loved him he would take care of his lambs and sheep. What makes Peter so believable is that he was tested like all of us get tested. He said he didn’t even know Jesus when he was arrested. Jesus looked at Peter...not out of anger...but with compassion and forgiveness. Peter’s fall would not stop Jesus from sending him out to bring other sheep into the flock called the Church.

Sheep and the Church do have one thing in common. Sheep know the shepherd’s voice and will come to him when he calls them. They know he will lead them to food, water and keep them safe from harm. Peter reminds us we sometimes act like sheep and run away and get lost. We don’t need to stay lost. Jesus the Good Shepherd knows each of us by name and we know him. He calls us to come back to him, the Keeper of our souls.

