

4th Sunday Easter Year "C"

May 11-12, 2019

*They shall never perish*

Readings: Acts 5:27-32,40-41; Revelation 7:14-17; John 10:27-30

This weekend is traditionally called Good Shepherd Sunday. Without doubt, the image of the shepherd is one of the most enduring in all of the Scriptures, because resonated with the people. Having just returned from my first ever visit to Ireland, I assure you that I saw plenty of sheep. It was the perfect time, as the lambs were born in April. On average each shepherd cares for slightly more than 100 sheep- a full-time job!

For Christians, the image is a spiritual one and it especially speaks to the priest. For many of us priests, it is our favorite image for ministry. This must always be first and foremost in his heart and soul. The prayers of the people are critical, for when we know that you are praying for us, it only strengthens our resolve to be shepherds after the heart of Christ.

At the same time, there are aspects of life, practical in nature, but nonetheless important. There are bills to pay, salaries and contracts and the like. Lights, locks, leaks, and litter- the four "L's" of being a pastor. A shepherd must also pay attention to these aspects of parish life. Each plays its own indispensable role. I am responsible for the whole parish, not simply one portion, even a critical one. I must be a prudent steward of your gifts to the Church and I myself take this very seriously.

In the Book of Revelation, we heard that it is the Lamb who will shepherd the people, leading them to springs of life-giving water. He will also wipe away the tear from their eyes. When we put our trust in the Lamb, we will follow his way. Both the Shepherd and the Lamb are images for Jesus Christ, each in its own way.

It is most especially in times of critical difficulties that we must turn towards the Good Shepherd for guidance. For one day we will stand before God's Throne, and we will be called upon to make an accounting of our life. Did we follow Jesus, the Good Shepherd?

Did we trust that he would guide us, and trust his Word, even when it challenged us, in fact especially when it challenged us? We all have our concerns about our families, our jobs and yes, even the Church; we desire what is good for the life of the Church and parents worry about their adult children's relationship with the Church.

A Good Shepherd also goes after the lost sheep and today, there are plenty of them. This is a most challenging aspect of ministry because increasingly, the lost do not desire to be found. They seem to have made definitive break from the faith and this is very hard to accept.

But we mustn't give into despair. This is part of the process of discerning how we can best respond in faith and hope to the love of the Lord. He does not want us to despair. Keep believing that Jesus the Good Shepherd cares about his sheep and will never cease to go after them.

It is because of this care that parents offer occasional tough love, for example. They do so not because they want to, but because a Good Shepherd cares enough and loves enough to tell the truth. The greatest gift we can pass along is the truth of the love of the Lord. May we never be afraid to do so, in season and out.

God has begun the good work in this parish. It has been nurtured throughout many storms and challenges. Please God, help us persevere in faith and trust and hope. Jesus, we place our hope in You.