

## Fourth Sunday of Easter – Cycle A April 13, 2008

Readings: Acts 2:14a,36-41; 1 Peter 2:20b-25; John 10:1-10

### Follow the Shepherd

Back in the early seventies, before we were married, Jenni and I went down for a day at Cedar Point, the amusement park in Ohio. The park is all built up with rides now, but back in those days they had two separate sections with rides and they were connected by a path through the woods called the Frontier Trail. Along the way they had a variety of artisans demonstrating their crafts. As we went down the trail, Jenni stopped and was mesmerized by a woman with a spinning wheel creating yarn. Several years later, after we were married and moved up to Romeo, she stumbled upon a spinning shop in town and the memories returned. Soon she had a spinning wheel, then two, then three. She would spin yarn and knit sweaters for us. She would go to elementary schools and put on demonstrations, especially around Thanksgiving. But she always had to go buy her fleece from someone else. One day I made the mistake of joking that she should raise her own sheep and complete the process from sheep to sweaters. She didn't take it as a joke. The next thing I knew I was building a small barn, digging a trench to run electricity, and putting up fencing for a small pasture to contain two sheep, Lan O'Lynn and Radar.

I did the construction, but Jenni cared for the sheep, feeding them and watering them. The only time I got involved is when she needed help holding them down as she gave them a shot, treated a wound, or clipped their hoofs. And so when I walked toward the pasture, the sheep ran away from the fence. But when Jenni was in the yard, they would stop and perk up their ears when they heard her voice, and they would run to the fence to greet her. They knew who their shepherd was by the sound of her voice; much like the sheep in the parable that Jesus tells about in this morning's gospel.

In Jesus' time, the shepherds would all bring their flocks together at night into a large penned area called the sheepfold and someone would be assigned as a lookout. In the morning, the shepherd would enter through the gate of the sheepfold and call his sheep. His sheep would recognize his voice and follow him out through the gate for the day. And Jesus uses this parable to tell us that we need to recognize the voice of Christ and to follow Him. He is our Shepherd that we are to follow. But in explaining the parable, Jesus also states that He is the gate to the sheepfold. In the parable He is both the Shepherd and the gate of the sheepfold.

But how does this imagery fit for us. In the Vatican II documents it states: "*The Church is a sheepfold whose one and indispensable door is Christ.*" (LG, 6) The Church contains Christ's flock and Jesus remains the gate, the way, to salvation. And Jesus is still the Good Shepherd, but he gave his Church human shepherds for the flock to follow when he returned to His Father. We are to hear and listen to these voices. This applies to all priests. It applies in greater way to the bishops, the successors of the apostles. And it applies most appropriately to the pope, the successor of Peter. After the

Resurrection, Jesus told Peter to tend His sheep; He told him to feed His lambs and His sheep.

Did Peter have the authority that would cause people to hear his voice and follow him after Jesus returned to the Father? Let's look at the scripture of our first reading from this morning and fill in a little that is missing at the beginning. This passage occurs right after the apostles had received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Acts 2:14 states: "***Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed to them, 'You who are Jews, indeed all of you staying in Jerusalem. Let this be known to you, and listen to my words.'***" St. Peter entreats them to listen to his words. He is the new shepherd. And after Peter gives them a short teaching about Christ, our reading goes on to say: "***Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart.***" They truly heard his voice. And they listened to Peter's instruction to repent and be baptized, and three thousand sheep were added to the flock that day.

It is a wonderful gift from God that Jesus gave us shepherds, our priests and bishops, to guide His Church. Without them we would all go astray. And our greatest gift is the Holy Father, the pope, the shepherd who can step in to settle any disputes to make sure there is no confusion about the path we are to follow. We need to be sure that we, the members of the flock in the sheepfold of the Church, listen to this shepherd appointed by God as he leads us through the gate, the way that is Jesus. And our current pope is Pope Benedict XVI who is from Germany. So we can honestly say, as I saw on a bumper sticker: "***My leader is a German Shepherd.***" We give thanks to God for him and for all our priests and bishops and all those who serve the Church. We here at Sacred Heart give special thanks to Fr. Ezequiel for all that he does for us.

And we give special thanks today because today is World Day of Prayer for Vocations. We pray for vocations so that we will not have a shortage of shepherds to tend Christ's flock. We need to pray for young men to respond to the call to the priesthood because we have a shortage of priests and many of our current priests are rapidly approaching the age where they should be able to retire. Three days ago, Fr. Zeke celebrated his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. We should be grateful that he continues to serve us.

We need our priests, but we all need to be active in carrying out the mission of the Church. Pope Benedict declared that the theme for this Day of Prayer for Vocations should be: "***Vocations at the service of the Church on mission.***" He states: "***The Risen Jesus gave to the Apostles this command: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Mt 28:19), assuring them: 'I am with you always, to the close of the age' (Mt 28: 20). The Church is missionary in herself and in each one of her members. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, every Christian is called to bear witness and to announce the Gospel...***" But then he adds: "***... this missionary dimension is associated in a special and intimate way with the priestly vocation.***"

We all have our roles in the Church, but the priest's role is a special one. Pray for our priests and thank them. Pray for vocations for new priests. Encourage young men to listen for God's call and pray that they have the strength to respond if they hear it. It is not an easy thing to do amidst the noise and distractions of our world.

**Deacon Joe Hulway**

