

## *Easter 4B 2015*

### *The Good Shepherd*

In the Gospel of John, Jesus identifies himself in many ways. He says of himself, I am the bread of life that has come down from heaven; I am the way, the truth, and the life; I am the light of the world; I am the resurrection and the life; I am the vine and you are the branches. But in today's Gospel Jesus identifies him as the Good Shepherd the one who lays down his life for the sheep.

Whereas the shepherd who works for pay leaves the sheep when danger comes, Jesus says that he is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep because they are his own and he loves them. Jesus the Good Shepherd knows his sheep and they know him; and so when they hear his voice, they follow where he goes, and he leads them into the pastures of everlasting life.

While shepherds and sheep are no longer part of our everyday life, the image of Jesus the Good Shepherd continues to hold a powerful attraction for us; for it reminds us of the intimate union we enjoy with Christ if belong to his flock. It reminds us that while other people invite us to follow them, they will not lay down their lives for us. While others invite us to listen to what they say, they do not speak the words of everlasting life.

But our relationship with Christ is different. Christ is the one who has already laid down his life for us. Christ is the one who speaks the Word of life, the

Word that can change and transform us again and again. To hear his voice is to hear the very Word of God. To obey his call is to enter into the fullness of life. And so Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls.

One of the most beloved of all the psalms is Psalm 23.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.  
He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;  
for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

The psalm proclaims that even when we walk through the darkest valleys of life there is nothing to fear, for Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is always present to us, even when we are not aware of his presence. He is present in our sorrow as well as our joy, in our failure as well as our success. Jesus the Good Shepherd is the one who leads us in the right path, the path that leads to the fullness Christ.

During this coming week, listen to the many voices that call and summon you every day: the voices you hear on television and radio, the voices you read in the newspaper, the voices that shout to you in social media, and then ask yourself a simple question. Can any of the voices give me the fullness of life? Then listen again to the voice of the Good Shepherd, the one who knows and love you, and calls you by name.