

Fourth Sunday of Easter 2020 (A): We Share the in the Shepherding the Risen Lord

Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Psalm 23:1-3a, 3b-4,5,6; 1 Peter 2:20b-25; John 10:1-10

Dear brother and sisters,

Greetings of Peace from our Good Shepherd!

Our parish patron saint, St. Therese of the Child Jesus, wrote on her diary, which I think a timeless and profound advise to all of us, she said, "Miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, here by a smiling look, there, by a kindly word; always doing the smallest right and doing it all for love."

I have been observing and reflecting how the COVID-19 Coronavirus pandemic painfully alters and threatens our personal and social life, while it crushes people down, creates unpleasant division concerning the lockdown, and reopening, but it awakens the best of our humanity. It inspires good deeds and prayerfulness. I see beautiful acts of self-giving in different parts of the world, and people become more prayerful or mindful. These are uplifting and beautiful expressions of who we are. Our human society survives and thrives through self-giving, helping others, and trust in God. If I may borrow the little way of St. Thérèse, I will say, when self-giving and prayerfulness are done with great love to help and save others, they profoundly mirror the fundamental quality of the heart of our Good Shepherd, Jesus.

We heard the declaration of our Lord Jesus this Sunday that he is the Good Shepherd. He assures us of his care and accompaniment to his sheep. He said, "Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture" (Jn. 10:7-9). He is the shepherd and the gate to the sheepfold.

What does it take to be a shepherd?

In those days, a shepherd ranks one of the lowest jobs. You have to be away from your family for a long time to bring the sheep to distant areas for pasture. Sometimes, you have to endure harsh weather conditions, not to mention the dangerous and foreign environment. The shepherd has to find a secure place, like a cave, to keep the sheep together and protected from predators. While the sheep are inside, the shepherd lays down his body at the entrance to protect the sheep. The shepherd's body becomes the gate itself. No one goes into the sheepfold without passing through him. It is risky and dangerous, and most of the time, it is only the owner who does this, not the hired ones. The hired shepherds don't have the heart for the sheep because they only work for personal gain. Jesus mentioned them as thieves and robbers. He addressed this to the Pharisees, who consider themselves above the people.

Having said this, the words of our Lord Jesus assure us he is not above and beyond us. He lowers himself, assumed his role as a shepherd to be intimately close with his sheep. He is our Good Shepherd, and we are his sheep. This reminds us of our profound relationship with Jesus. It is a relationship that is founded by his love and obedience to the Father. Because of his love and obedience, he offered and laid down his life to protect his sheep. He is a shepherd whose only interest is for our salvation. He's the door of the sheepfold that opens the way to eternal life.

"Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture" (Jn. 10:

The sacrifice of Jesus, the gift of salvation, and the newness of life he freely offered to us can never be repaid equally. It can only be received with an open and grateful heart. And yes, we cannot pay him back with the same fashioned he did for us, but we can pay it forward. We imitate the self-giving of the shepherd by being a good shepherd and a door of opportunity and life for others. These are what the Good Shepherd wills for his sheep. The words of Peter in our second reading echoes this paying forward. He said, "Beloved: If you are patient

when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God. For this, you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps"(1 Pt. 20-21).

It is our calling to participate in this shepherding of Jesus, that is, on guiding, leading, protecting, caring for others. Good shepherding happens when we are in union with the Good Shepherd himself. It is a paradigm of our Christian life. The words of Peter in the first reading (Acts 2:14a,36-41) describe it as a relationship nurtured with "a life of conversion," a life of prayer and meditation so that our life will be filled with Jesus. Without this relationship, our words and actions may become about "ME," not about Jesus, who cares for others.

Yesterday, I was made aware by Bernie Gora, our school principal, that one of the kindergarten children of St. Theresa School, Thomasine Aceseves, did her humble way of responding to the uncertainties that many of us experience during our time due to the pandemic. Little Thomasine, whose school routine was sadly altered by COVID-19 pandemic, did something to connect herself with the school and her classmates. She had sewn several masks with the help of her parents to give for her classmates and teacher.

As I reflected on this kindness and thoughtfulness of Thomasine, I think she was not only thinking about how her classmates are doing but also she's concern about their safety. It is an act of being a shepherd for others, an opportunity of sharing small acts of love like St. Thérèse. Thomasine's parent delivered the masks she made to the school and hung the package on the doorknob and left the box outside the door. But sadly, they were stolen.

Whoever stole the masks, I hope the person shares them with others since they have the markings of the kindness of Thomasine. But let me say this to Thomasine: you are our little shepherd! Although the masks that you have sewn were stolen, your act of kindness will never be stolen. It will multiply. Thank you! Thanks to your parents.

Let us all be a shepherd, think like a shepherd, act as a shepherd according to the heart of Jesus.

Happy shepherding Sunday to all of you.

In Christ,

Fr. Manny Hewe
Pastor, CCST