

Fourth Sunday of Easter

"I am the Good Shepherd," so opens today's Gospel, the very words of Jesus. Note that Jesus did not say, "I am like a good shepherd", but I am the Good Shepherd. By saying "I am" means that Jesus acts and will act in conformity to what he is, the Good Shepherd. What constitutes a Good Shepherd? How does he act? The Old Testament draws a good portrait of the Good Shepherd. As I read these characteristics, think in your mind how Jesus does, indeed, fulfill them

The Good Shepherd travels with his flock from pasture to pasture as the seasons change, leading them to pasture and water.

He leads them to shelter in bad weather and even defends the sheep against beasts prey and bandits. Remember David when still a youth boasted that he killed lions and bears with his bare hands when they attacked his father's flock.

- The shepherd establishes a memorable rapport with his flock,
 - They recognize his voice and distinguish it from others
 - They learn to obey commands by his voice.
- He seeks out the lost sheep.
- The sick sheep are carried in his arms
- When the sheep are scattered he gathers them around him.

Jesus truly is the Good Shepherd and not like the "hired hand", who is not a shepherd and does not own the sheep. He sees a wolf coming, leaves the sheep, and runs away. He will not risk his life for what is not his own.

Jesus says, "I know my sheep and my sheep know me." A story has been told that there were some people walking along on a mountain road being guided by a shepherd. On the side of the road lay a dead sheep. The shepherd went over to it and came back saying, "It is not mine." The people wondered how he could know. The animal had no brand mark or other markings on it. All sheep look alike. The shepherd simply said, "You think all sheep look alike! Well I know my own." Like that shepherd, Jesus also knows his own. "I know my sheep and my sheep know me in the same way that the Father knows me and I know the Father." Each of us needs to ponder carefully that comparison and draw out its meaning for ourselves. For me, it tells me that Jesus knows me personally, as He calls me to know Him personally. He calls me, seeks me and heals me, just as I call Him, seek him, and am healed by Him. I need never feel lost or unimportant, forsaken or neglected. To Him, I am unique. I

am never alone. I am His and He is mine.

Jesus goes on to say, "For these sheep, I will give my life. No one can take it from me. I have power to lay it down...and power to take it up again." This comment I received from my Father. What expressive words these are and what they express it total, unconditional love. The Father's love for His Son and for us the sheep and Jesus love for His Father and his sheep. What is given to him by the Father is the confidence that this should instill in our hearts and follow our Good Shepherd wherever He leads. There is only one place He leads us---to the Father.

Psalm 22(23), with a little commentary says it all:

- The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want for.
 - Jesus is all that I have.
 - Jesus gives me all that I need.
 - My life is in His hands.
- I rest and green are the pastures where he gives me repose, resting in the bosom of the Father where we feed and find our rest.
- Near restful waters he leads me, to revive my dragging spirit. Water flowing from the Spirit of Jesus, which strengthens us on our journey.
- He guides me along the night path-Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. He is true to His name-He is the Good Shepherd.
- If I should walk in the valley of darkness, no evil would I fear. You are there with your crook and your staff, with these you comfort me. Jesus has come into our valley of darkness and with his cross he brings us comfort-our salvation.
- You have prepared a banquet for me in the sight of my foes. The very Body and Blood of Christ! What a banquet!
- My head You have anointed with oil; my cup is overflowing. The anointing of the sick floods the souls with graces, bringing healing, comfort and forgiveness of sin.
- Surely goodness and kindness shall follow me all the days of my life.
- In the Lord's own house, shall I dwell forever and ever, if I follow our good shepherd in confidence. May we all do so. This we ask as we receive our Lord in His banquet today.

May 4, 2009