

## HOMILY by Fr. Anthony Davis

**“I am the Good Shepherd, I know my Sheep and mine know me...They hear my voice...And I lay down my life for my sheep...”**

April 25, 2021

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter (Year B)

Acts 4:8-12; I Jn. 3:1-2; Jn. 10:11-18

The fourth Sunday of Easter is known as “Good Shepherd Sunday”. It is also the “World Day of Prayer for Vocations”. Each year on this Sunday we reflect on the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, devotedly taking care of his flock. Thus, our gospel today is the favorite of many of Jesus’ disciples, as he declares: “I am the Good Shepherd, I know my Sheep and mine know me...They hear my voice...And I lay down my life for my sheep...”

However, what many of us haven’t had the opportunity to learn is that the life of a shepherd can be difficult. It isn’t as glamorous, smooth and cozy as we might think. In Jesus’ day the job of a shepherd was lonely, harsh, and dangerous. If the sheep were attacked, whether by wild animals or robbers, the shepherd had to be ready to lay down his life for the sheep.

Who is a Good Shepherd? Yes of course, Jesus isn’t talking about real “sheep-herding”. Rather he is talking about his relationship to his people, that intimate personal bond that Jesus has for his followers- for us. He did lay down his life for us. In the Scripture too, to know is to love. I.E. The shepherd loves his sheep and they love him. And indeed, the Good Shepherd-Jesus- and his people are united by mutual love-a bond that enabled him to lay down his life for us! This is very mission of the Church, and that is why as the leader, the Priest, is called “The Pastor of the flock”. Indeed, this intimate personal bond, is what Pope Francis refers to as “Smelling like the sheep.” And we are to be the “Voice of the Voiceless”!

On the other hand, hired hands are very different. They care for the sheep out of self-interest-just as a job- in order to earn a paycheck. Hence whenever there is any danger, they run away, deserting the flock. In other words, these selfish shepherds look out for themselves rather than the sheep. *“Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture, declares Yahweh” (Jer.23:1).*

This is what the imitation of Jesus is all about! How? We may not be shepherds as a profession or career. Yet metaphorically, it is an option for life, for how we live. We are shepherds of our brothers and sisters; we have the obligation to care for them, and this obligation, we need to accept willingly, and freely. By this I mean, the poor, the needy, the sick, the outcast, the refugees, and immigrants are all our brothers and sisters. Sometimes, we might be misunderstood in speaking up for them. We might even experience hostility. But that doesn’t excuse us from our obligation to be good shepherds. Remember what Jesus said to Peter: “Simon do you love me? Feed my sheep”(Jn.21:15-17).

However, due to this lack of love and care, sadly, so many people in our cities and towns (all dutifully Baptized, given 1st.Communion, and Confirmed), no longer follow the Shepherd’s voice or lean on his love. Rather these folks- “The crowds without company”-search in alcohol, drugs, and wild weekend

parties, for some form of “replacement shepherding” that they fathom, will ease their spiritual emptiness and anchor their loneliness.

Therefore, let’s pray that the Good Shepherd will never have to go out on the hills and into the gullies looking for us. And we pray that the “Crowds without Company” will also allow themselves to listen to his voice, and to be found by him, so that they may be lavished with love and care, and be carried home in joy on his shoulders. Truly, “I am the Good Shepherd I know my Sheep and mine know me...They hear my voice...And I lay down my life for my sheep...”.