

4th Sun. Easter 2026

+There is an ancient Jewish legend that explains why God chose Moses to be the leader of His people. When Moses was feeding the sheep of his father-in-law in the wilderness, a young lamb ran away. Moses followed after it until it reached a ravine, where it found a well to drink from. When Moses got up to it he said, 'I did not know that you ran away because you were thirsty. Now you must be exhausted.' He took the little lamb on his shoulders and carried it back. Then God said, 'Because you have shown pity in leading back a member of a flock belong to man, you shall lead my flock Israel.'¹

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday. Jesus as the Good Shepherd reminds us of the vigilance and patience of the love of God. And He showed this long before the Incarnation. Throughout the Old Testament God is pictured as the shepherd and the people as his flock. Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd." Psalm 77, "Thou didst lead thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron." And to prepare the world for the true, ultimately good shepherd, Jesus...we have multiple key figures from the past who were shepherds. I already mentioned Moses, Joshua was described as 'like a shepherd over the people of Israel.' David was shepherding Jesse's flock when Samuel called him.

Why this insistence on the image and role of a shepherd. We first have to abandon our Western notion of shepherd or livestock. Because Jesus is using the Palestinian form of shepherding as a symbol...it's very relational...this type of shepherd leads the sheep from the front and the sheep follow. Jesus is not a sheep dog who drives them from behind. And in other parts of the world, sheep are raised for their meat, but in Palestine they are raised primarily for

¹ William Barclay, Daily Study Bible.

their wool, and so it happens that the sheep are with the shepherd for years. That allows for them to trust him, to recognize the shepherds voice.

Shepherds of this kind often give their sheep names, so they can call them individually when necessary. Jesus said, “the shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” This is true for each of us. Christ gives names to every Christian at their baptism, and from there calls each of us by name through the sacramental life that leads to eternal pastures in Heaven. And along the way He cares for His flock on an individual basis, in a very a personal manner. We are forgiven, healed, and nourished by Christ. He does this primarily through the sacraments, which are offered by the pastors of His Church...the Bishop and his priests.

Pastor is Latin for shepherd, we are like little shepherds at the service of the true shepherd, Christ. Bishops and priests are but images who direct the flock to the Good Shepherd, Jesus who said in today’s Gospel, “I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved.” Jesus is both shepherd and gate. It’s through Christ that we enter the Church, which is the sheepfold that he mentions. Our mystical membership in the Church is what makes us members of His flock. And from there He leads us.

Sheep are extremely helpless, defenseless on their own. It’s why they flock together. To be a solitary sheep is dangerous, it’s a good way to get eaten. And spiritually speaking Peter references this danger. “Be sober and alert, because your adversary the devil, is a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” Scripture also says, *Woe to the solitary man! For if he should fall, he has no one to lift him up* (Eccles 4:10). Sheep are not supposed to go off on their own, and neither are we.

We are called to part of a flock and to be under the care of a shepherd. Most of us realize this in a parish setting, but in the wider sense, each of us is under the care of a bishop and ultimately the care of the Pope, who is the chief shepherd and Vicar of Christ, the Good Shepherd. Just a few verses beyond what we heard in today's passage, Jesus said that there is to be one flock and one shepherd. God wants us to be in the protection of the flock with a shepherd watching over us. Too many are quick to criticize the Pope, too liberal...too conservative and even justify their leaving the Church, but we have remember that to wander from the care of the flock and the shepherd is a very dangerous thing.

Sheep are also wary of strangers. Jesus says, "*He who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep...the sheep hear his voice... and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him.*" Sheep have the remarkable quality of knowing their master's voice and of instinctively fearing any other. In this way, sheep are smarter than most of us, we don't flee voices contrary to Christ's. Instead, we draw close to those voices and ask, "Tell me more." We tune in to the voices on TV, podcasts, the internet...we allow ourselves to be influenced by those voices...rarely considering how maybe I should be tuning those voices out.

We must be more wary, like sheep, and respond only to one voice: that of the Lord speaking through His Church. We must flee every other voice when it says anything contrary to what Christ says. And to be familiar with the voice of Jesus, we have to read Scripture and spend with the Lord in prayer. If we're not doing that, it'll be hard to distinguish the voice of God from all the noises in the world. But if the ears of our hearts are tuned into the voice of Jesus we will remain close to Him, under His shepherds care. That's how the life of our soul remains secure in an insecure world and how we're led to the eternal happiness to which God calls us.