

## 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, Year "A"

### Good Shepherd Sunday (Vocation Sunday)

Many of us are familiar with this beautiful **Aesop's fable** for children.

Once upon a time, Dodger the Dog said, "Oh boy, I can't wait to chew on this delicious bone!"

"Where'd you get that bone?" asked Sharon, the sheep. "The farmer gave it to me," said Dodger proudly. "He said I earned it by being such a hard worker."

"A hard worker? All you do is lie around all day. We sheep do all the hard work!"

"Lying around is hard work," said Dodger.

He went back to chewing on his bone. Sharon ran off to tell the other sheep. "You won't believe what I have to tell you," Sharon said when she reached her friends. "That lazy dog, Dodger, got another treat for being a hard worker."

"No way," exclaimed Sophie. "All he does is lie around all day. We give the farmer so much, and we never get anything."

The sheep decided that they were going to complain to the farmer. If the dog got treats for doing nothing, they should get treats, too.

When the farmer came around with their evening meal, all of the sheep gathered around him. "Farmer, we have something to say to you," said Sharon.

"Go ahead!" said the farmer.

"Every day, all Dodger does is lie around, but you give him treats for being a hard worker. We provide you with wool, lambs, and milk, but we never get any treats."

"Yeah," piped up Sophie. "All we ever get is grass."

"Is that so? Well, I suppose I'll have to change the way things are done around here," said the farmer.

The sheep were happy that the farmer listened to their complaints. They couldn't wait to see what treats they would get.

However, when the farmer came back, he didn't have any treats for them. Instead, he called Dodger and had the dog follow him back to the farmhouse.

"Maybe he's going to make Dodger work for his treats," said Sharon. "We didn't need that lazy dog around here anyway," said Sophie.

It started to get dark, and the sheep got ready to go to sleep. When they were just about to close their eyes, they heard the sound of wolves.

"Oh, no!" said Sharon. "The wolves are coming!"

As the sound of the wolves got closer, the sheep became scared. Just then, the sound of the wolves was interrupted by a loud barking sound. It was Dodger! He raced to the sheep and scared away the wolves.

"Oh, Dodger! Thank you for saving us," said Sophie. "Yes, thank you Dodger," the other sheep chimed in.

"Do you think I am such a lazy dog now?" asked Dodger.

"Oh, no! You are our hero!" said Sharon.

"I know it might look like I lie around all day," said Dodger, "but without me, you'd be eaten by wolves, and thieves would come and steal you."

"We are sorry we called you lazy," said Sophie. "We didn't realize how much work you really did."

As the sheep started to settle back down, the farmer came out to the field.

"Good work, Dodger!" the farmer said. He threw the dog another bone.

Even though the dog didn't look like he worked hard, Sharon and other sheep now realized how important the dog was!

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday. It is a fitting day to pray for vocations in the Church, which includes marriage, priesthood, and the single lifestyle. Our vocation is to be holy, and in whichever state we find ourselves, the Church invites us to use our gifts and talents for the greater glory of God and for the sanctification of the world.

The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is the best image for vocations. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and human beings are the sheep of His flock. Unlike the shepherds of Israel who abandoned the sheep to care for themselves, Jesus was the Good Shepherd who sacrificed His life so that the sheep may live and have life in abundance.

It is no coincidence that the Bible calls us "sheep." From Aesop's story and if you have had the opportunity of looking after the sheep, you would agree with me that a sheep is an animal with a very low IQ. It is easy to displease sheep and also easy to please sheep. A sheep easily gets itself into trouble and easily opens

its mouth to cry for help. You practically need to go several times during the day to untie or unhook the sheep so that they can move about to get some food to eat. After all is said and done, at the end of the day, the sheep remains a gentle and lovely animal.

We are grateful that during this coronavirus pandemic, the government is coming to the aid of the masses with food and money to care for our needs. However, in the midst of the uncertainty of this time, like sheep, we often feel hopeless and helpless. This feeling is not caused by hunger but by the vision of a world without hope. Our hearts are longing for a superman who will rescue us from this state of uncertainty.

How we feel now is not different from the condition of the Israelites when the shepherds abandoned them in the desert of sin to care only for themselves. It appears like life has no future to it. Like the sheep in Aesop's story, we may begin to see God as sleeping and not caring about us. We have questioned God's existence like the sheep questioned the importance of the dog on the farm.

Today, our faith assures us that our God is able. God will act at the right time. In the midst of the uncertainty of this time, we hear the voice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, saying, "I AM the Gate ... whoever enters through Me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture."

The greatest desire of the human heart cannot be found in material things: It can only be found in God. And the good news is that the spirit of the Good Shepherd has been given to us through baptism. We have been endowed and empowered to become a "good shepherd" to someone.

During this pandemic, we are called to imitate Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who gave His life as a ransom for many. This is not the time to complain like Sharon and Sophie. We should not resort to self-pity but, instead, like Dodger Dog, reach out to save lives and help those in need.

Jesus has come so that we may have life and have it abundantly. Even in the midst of the pandemic, the goodness of the Lord still abounds. The crisis of this time is an opportunity to perform good deeds that lead to salvation. There is, therefore, no excuse for any baptized child of God to be in need in the midst of plenty. Like the good shepherds we are called to become, let us claim our victory, work hard to sow the seeds of love, justice, beauty, and goodness, and it shall be well with us. Alleluia ... Amen.