

# Sunday Homily

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

25 APRIL 2021

YEAR B

“The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd.”

John 10:13-14

### Illustration

At the end of one of the Harry Potter films the hero's headmaster, Professor Dumbledore, says: “It is not the abilities you have that make you what you are – it is the choices that you make.” Thus a modern amusing film suddenly takes on the nature of a morality play!

### Gospel Teaching

It would be quite wrong to assume that just because a person is paid to do a job, they have less interest and less dedication. But we can all recognise the truth of what Jesus says. We often complain that levels of service are “not what they were”, and we get infuriated when we are forced to listen to recorded messages on our telephones. We want something extra, beyond what is efficient or economic. We want something that we can describe as good.

This is what Jesus describes as the qualities of the good shepherd. He knows his sheep. He protects them from the wolf. He is prepared to lay down his life for them. This word that Jesus uses – “good” – describes the difference between the able person and the one who chooses to give love and service. Jesus is not talking about one occupation – although the image of a shepherd makes us think about pastoral care. He is speaking about an attitude which should be an essential part of life for those who follow his teaching. Naturally we think that Jesus is speaking of himself as the shepherd, and the Church as his sheep. We are those who get lost, who run into danger, and who become scattered.

First, there is a message to the Church in this. We must try and avoid losing contact with our master. We must try and keep together, rather than fragment our church into little groups that need to be brought into one flock. We must recognise the gifts that the good shepherd displays – the pastoral gifts which we are all called to show. Pastoral care springs from our faith in a loving, caring God. We do not employ a vicar, rector, or minister to carry out this task alone (a hired hand!). We are all called to share in the “shepherding” of the flock.

Second, there is a message to us all in the work we do each day. We are called to be good as well as competent. There is an extra responsibility that demands

the commitment shown by the good shepherd: a care for those around us; a willingness to show integrity, and honesty, to go the extra mile. That is what makes the difference between the ones who are just doing a job because they are being paid for it, and those who are fulfilling their calling – whatever that may be. We are all able to recognise that difference in others. Do they see it in us?

Third, there is a message to us in our homes. It is at home that we may be impatient and intolerant, where we can acknowledge that we are tired, and let our behaviour show it. The good shepherd had to return home at the end of his tiring day in the fields and on the moors: Jesus would certainly not have suggested that he then could forget his principles and cease to care for others – to drop his attitude of care and love.

## Application

The picture that Jesus gives of the shepherd of his day is one that still applies to us, whatever our work and occupation. The concept of good work, done with honesty and integrity, is one that we can recognise. We can contrast it with jobs that are done grudgingly and with what we call “ill grace”.

That is a very appropriate term to use. Those who follow the teaching of Jesus, the good shepherd, work and live with grace – not with ill grace! These are virtues that we can show in our church, in our daily work and in our home. In each of these places today we see the need of the grace of God. In our churches we know that we should be one: one within each worshipping community, and one in the whole Church of God. In daily work, and in international politics, we know the need of truth and of healing. In our homes we know the need of honesty and purity. All of us who try to follow Christ are taught that we need to have, in every part of life, the qualities of the good shepherd.