

## *Fr. Gary's Homily Notes*

**Fourth Sunday of Easter - Good Shepherd Sunday | April 21, 2024**

When the scriptures talk about the “Good Shepherd,” I’m not sure we get it. Not really. I mean, we’ve seen photos of shepherds, heard stories and maybe even learned a Christmas song or two that talk about the shepherds, but few of us (if any) have ever actually met one. Have you ever heard a shepherd calling out to their sheep while sitting on your back patio or smelled them standing alongside of you at Starbucks. I don’t think so.

We are told that shepherds would guard their sheep against predators, lead them in the wilderness to find food and water, shelter them from the storms and the heat of the sun. They lived with them, slept at their side and carried them when they were injured. But, when Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd it is, at best, by imagination, not by experience that we can connect.

But here is where I think we can connect: One of the most important tasks that fell upon the shoulders of the shepherd was to gather. And that is where our knowledge of God can help us. We know that God is THE gathering force in life. God loves all his creation. No one is less important in the eyes of God, less essential for the good of God’s Kingdom or less significant in the great plan of God than any other. Being the Great Gather, then, was at the root of God’s plan of salvation for his children, and why God described himself as the shepherd of Israel.

So, yes, the Good Shepherd came into the world to feed us, to protect us, to carry us when we are injured, to shelter us from the storms. But, ultimately, all of that serves God’s first and always intention: to gather us into his kingdom.

Having the privilege of being part of his flock, as children of God who bear his name, we share the responsibility to gather in his name. It would do us well, laity and clergy, hierarchy and fellow servants to keep this in mind. It would do us well as parents and children, community members and neighbors to remember this. It would do us well, as players on this mighty field of life to bear in mind the name we are privileged to hold, and shepherding of which we are called to be a part.

Anything that is in opposition to unity, all that casts apart or separates or divides cannot be of God and therefore cannot be of us. Anything that bullies or belittles, pushes aside or makes insignificant anyone in the family of God cannot be of God and therefore cannot be of us. Gathering cannot happen when there is language that is divisive or condemning; gathering cannot happen when any of his creation is not honored. Gathering cannot happen when the lives of some people are protected or held in higher esteem than others.

As privileged followers of the Good Shepherd, we are also called to be, in the name of Jesus, gatherers of the same flock, fellow shepherds of children of God. Every-last-smelly-one-of-them.