

Fourth Sunday of Easter (B)

April 29, 2012

Even though our Easter lilies have wilted by now, we, as church, still proclaim in word and song the great Passover of our Lord from death to resurrection. We are given on this particular Fourth Sunday after Easter the rich and provocative image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, who doesn't run off when hard times roll. He lays down his life for his sheep.

I am well aware that many of us are unhappy with the Archdiocese and its encouragement of signature-gathering on Referendum 74, or with Rome and its appointment of Archbishop Sartain as delegate to the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. The prophets among us want hard choices to be made while others are more willing to tolerate compromise as the best way of holding the family together.

Is there something here today for our communion, our growth in faith, our common understanding, our journey toward love and reconciliation? I think there is. I believe it is found in the very diversity in which we dwell and have our being and seek to hear clearly the voice of the Shepherd. We reach beyond our differences of language, race, sexual orientation, economics and politics to love each other and care for each other. We welcome all with God's great greeting of *shalom*.

This is the importance of the Annual Catholic Appeal and the ministries it funds across the Archdiocese and in our own parish. Every day, more of our sisters and brothers face the crises of poverty, hunger and homelessness. If you have a passion for social justice or for excellent liturgy or for good communications, there is a place for you in our community. We need your passion, your ideas, your time and whatever treasures you are moved to share with us.

There is diversity in the wonderful Good Shepherd image. In the Holy Land today you can still witness this diversity. Around dusk each day, you can still spot Bedouin shepherds bringing their flocks home from various pastures they have grazed during the day. It is the same scene Jesus saw two thousand years ago.

Often the flocks end up at the same watering hole, so they get all mixed together. Eight or nine small flocks turning into a convention of thirsty sheep. Their shepherds never worry about the mix-up. When it is time to go home, each one uses a distinct call: a whistle, a trill, a particular tune on a reed pipe. The sheep know to whom they belong. They hear their shepherd's voice, and it is the only one they will follow.

On this Good Shepherd Sunday we gather from so many places and even so many perspectives at the watering hole where we renewed our own baptismal promises. For one short hour we mingle and wonder and hope and are amazed at our diversity. Although we hear different voices from different shepherds, we know that there is only one voice that we must listen to: the unique voice of God who is speaking to us all.

We faithful ones sometimes get so wrapped up in praying: "Hear *us*, Lord" or "Hear *our* prayer" that we forget that God is speaking to us: "Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening." What a world it would be if, in our rich diversity today, we would honestly listen to the voice of God, speaking in the unique way God always speaks to friends. God doesn't shout, but whispers. Today, and everyday after we leave this watering hole, let's open wide our ears so that each of will live in a church and a world that is as loving, forgiving, and self-giving as the Good Shepherd.

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Pastor