

#### **4<sup>th</sup> (QA&SJ) Sunday of Easter Year B** (Good Shepherd Sunday)

*“I am the Good Shepherd.”* The title *‘shepherd’* in Scripture refers primarily to God who guards and guides His people. The shepherd is the heart and soul of the flock. The true shepherd is responsible for everything that pertains to the life and safety of the whole flock. A good shepherd, says Jesus, lays down his life for the sheep. This is the criterion for determining the authenticity of shepherds coming after Jesus. *But what does the Bible mean when it speaks of the leaders of God’s people as shepherds?* It envisions leaders, who *feed, protect* and *feel* with the people as a good shepherd does for his flock. We’ve heard many discussions about images of Jesus. Some may object to the whole image of the shepherd and sheep. But, instead of interpreting a biblical passage literally we need to see the basic lesson being taught. Jesus is like a shepherd and we are like sheep. That’s a great compliment to us, for the shepherd loves his sheep and risks his life for them. Jesus is saying that his relationship to us is very close. We should feel honored. The Lord used many different examples to convey His intimate union with us. He is our teacher and we are his learners. He is our Master and we are his disciples. He is our Savior and we are saved. He is our God and we are His people.

In those days when shepherds call and gather the flock back to the shelter of the sheepfold for the night, they sleep by literally lying across the entrance so that before a wild beast would attack the sheep, it would have to attack them first. Before Jesus left the world he commissioned Peter to feed his lambs and tend his sheep. The work of shepherding God’s flocks is an ongoing task that is entrusted to the whole church with Peter as head. As we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday, we need to ask these two important questions: *Am I a faithful member of God’s flock? How could I participate more closely in the work of shepherding?*

If we take a closer look at ourselves, we will realize that all of us have a chance to be leader-shepherds in our own right. Some of us may hold seemingly ordinary positions and roles: parents, teachers, clerks, factory worker, farmer, utility personnel, but none of these is insignificant. You may be the president, mayor, doctor, pastor, administrator, director or manager who hold key positions in a community or group but this doesn't make you a step higher to the people you serve. Whatever our position in life may be, today's *gospel reminds us that effective leadership demands that personal touch be given to those under our care*. The challenge in Christian leadership lies in our ability to see the 'person' in every man and woman, rather than seeing them as just another man or woman that we can make use of. The real worth of an individual lies in the '*gift of person, not in how efficiently one performs one's functions*'. Our concern for the personal needs and growth of others will bring forth better relationships and a well-functioning community. After all, "*the test of true leadership is fellowship*" This is how Jesus leads.

*A good Shepherd is the one who cares for and protects the lives of those within the sheepfold.* Reading further on the Good Shepherd Gospel Jesus said, "*I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away...*" What is the difference between these two? A good shepherd leads and guides devotedly while hired workers are serving their ego and their agenda rather than the community they are supposed to care for. A hired worker will do things for profit, and will work only within scheduled paid time. Beyond that is overtime work that demands extra pay. We need our pay to survive. But there are far greater reasons to work than just for pay. A true good shepherd works with mission not for higher compensation or commission. A good mother wakes up at midnight to attend to her crying baby. A hired man will not

endanger his life for his job. A faithful person will risk breaking his neck for a friend in danger because of their friendship. A hired man greatly rejoices at a holiday when he can get paid without having to work. For a good shepherd, every day is a holy day with the sheep.

*“I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold.” What is my attitude towards other people who have a different culture and religion? We can be a good shepherd in our state of life by reaching out to all members of our community with understanding and compassion. Let us not allow our biases and prejudices hinder us from seeing the divine in every person, created in the image and likeness of God. A true shepherd knows, loves, guides and defends. He knows the way, shows the way, and goes the way. Jesus is the Shepherd who feeds us with his Word in the Eucharist. He is the shepherd who feeds us with His body and blood in Holy Communion. The shepherd listens to the voices of his sheep and recognizes their needs. Regardless of our various roles and titles in the Church or in the community, we are all members of the one flock and have but one Shepherd. May we have the heart, the love, and the concern of Jesus, Our Good Shepherd. Amen.*