

THE UPPER ALDE BENEFICE

The Fourth Sunday of Easter



This Fourth Sunday of Easter is always known as 'Good Shepherd Sunday' because the gospel reading for the day is from the Gospel according to St. John chapter 10.

"I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (St. John 10:11).

The images of sheep and shepherds are some of the most powerful in the Bible. Psalm 23 picks up the warm and comforting image of the believer as a sheep in the personal care of God. The Psalmist is safe and secure precisely because 'the Lord is my Shepherd'. He is convinced that he will lack nothing because God himself weilds the staff of protection and leads him through the valley of the shadow of death to green pastures and still waters.

The shepherd is also a common image in the Old Testament Prophets. There it stands for spiritual leaders. There are those who are not true to their calling and who exploit God's people and lead them astray. In contrast there is the promise of the appearance of a descendant of King David who will shepherd God's sheep in his name.

When, therefore, our Lord describes himself as 'the good shepherd' he is emphasizing the willingness of the shepherd to die for his sheep. In New Testament times shepherding could be a very dangerous occupation. The good shepherd who values the sheep for themselves will lay down his life for them. In fact, it is in this, the laying down of his life, that the goodness of the shepherd is established.

It seems foolish to think of a human being willing to die for mere animals, however great their affection for them. Nevertheless the amazing goodness of God is fully displayed in this awesome wonder: our Lord loved us enough to lay down his life for us.

It's amazing how the various passages of Holy Scripture which we have been reading in these days after Easter have been particularly relevant in the present crisis. We can be forgiven for feeling like lost sheep. We may understandably feel alone in a dark and hostile world which has been invaded by an invisible enemy. We are reminded this week of the Good Shepherd. We know that he loves us because he has laid down his life for us. He who loves us this much will never desert us. In Jesus we are never alone.

Prayer

Merciful Father,
you gave your Son Jesus Christ to be the good shepherd,
and in his love for us to lay down his life and rise again:
keep us always under his protection,
and give us grace to follow in his steps;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

A shepherd tells his dog to go count the sheep...

So the dog goes out, comes back a little later. Shepherd says: "How many sheep you count out there?"

Dog says: "40".

Shepherd says: "That's not possible, I only had 38 to begin with!"

And the dog says: "Yeah but I rounded them up".