



**Fourth Sunday of Easter
Good Shepherd Sunday**

Homily

**By the Most Rev Bishop Don Sproxtton
Auxiliary Bishop of Perth**

St Mary's Cathedral Parish House
Sunday 3 May, 2020

If or when you have the chance to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, as I had when I accompanied teachers and some of their spouses to Tantur, it would be good to include the Shepherds' Field on the itinerary.

This is the place where the shepherds heard the message that Jesus had been born in Bethlehem. It is a place where small caves and caverns open out below ground level, and are thought to be the sort of shelter that shepherds would have used as they rested after their days of work in the pastures round about.

Shepherds were a dangerous lot. You kept away from them. They were hard, tough men. They were known as men who would break any of the Commandments without a second thought. Yet, regardless of the reputation of shepherds, the prophets and Jesus himself chose to use the figure of the shepherd to describe the role of leaders and, most importantly, the mission of Christ. At this halfway point through Easter season, we are given the Gospel of the Good Shepherd for our prayerful reflection. It is a day when we pray especially for the shepherds that have been called by God to give themselves to care and serve the Christian community. So, today, we are urged to remember the priests and deacons who assist the bishops in their vocation as shepherds. Let's pray for them in a special way during this Mass.

God, of course, is THE shepherd of humanity. The Lord guards, protects and cares for his people, his sheep. The Lord chooses those who in every place and time are given a share in that service of leadership. He provides them with the graces of strength, courage and perseverance to give their lives wholeheartedly to this service for their people.

My favourite quote from Pope Francis on leadership comes from one of his reflections on being a shepherd like Jesus. He encouraged us to imitate what Jesus does as he shepherds us. Sometimes Jesus walks ahead of the flock; sometimes he walks behind us; sometimes he walks alongside us.



If we reflect on our lives to this point, it is possible for us to identify when Jesus walked on ahead of us. There would have been moments when we needed to know what he was asking of us or why it was that we had to move forward into the unknown.

There have been moments when we needed encouragement to keep going with the plan he has in mind for our Christian communities and us individually, so he walked behind us, keeping us together and focused.

And there have been moments when we needed to be reassured that he was walking beside us, gently providing what it was that we needed.

It is good to stop and give time to this sort of reflection. We can revisit those events in our lives that brought us happiness and joy, sadness or unsettled us. Maybe as we look back we are able to do so with the hindsight of knowing what followed these events, what we expected and what outcomes were unexpected, yet good. Can we recognise the presence of Christ in our lives by having lived through these events? Is there a sense that we have been consoled and are at peace, no matter what we had to go through at the time?

St John also speaks of Jesus being the Gate through whom we enter eternal life. This again may seem unusual.

In the Shepherds' Field, the shepherds would create fenced areas. These afforded their small flocks safety during the night. The sheep were protected from marauding wolves and lions, and protected them from thieves - other shepherds - who might try to steal sheep them.

Because there was a strong relationship between shepherd and sheep, the individual sheep would respond to its shepherd when he called out its name the next morning as he stood at the gateway. The flock would follow him to a new pasture for the day.

The fruit of reflecting on the events of our lives is that we may grow in trust in Jesus, the Risen Lord. Again and again, he said to the first disciples, "Do not be afraid. I will be with you". Our trust in Jesus builds upon his words that he is with us, and through recalling the specific examples from our lives where his power, and grace were at work. Some of these experiences will be very clear; others will be less so, maybe because the outcomes were not as we wished or expected, and there may still be more work to be done to see the grace or gift in what happened.

At the beginning of each day, the Lord calls us forth by name, to take us to a new pasture. The next day he will lead us to another area of life, but not alone: new pastures so that we can grow and become more the Christian that we can be and enter eternal life.

Jesus leads us to new pastures to feed us.



During this time where we are unable to gather for Mass in our parishes, we need to draw nourishment for ourselves from the many sources that are at hand. Try to remember that your bishops and priests are celebrating the Mass each day for everyone in the Archdiocese. It might be good to pray the Prayer of Spiritual Communion each day knowing that the Eucharist is being celebrated for you.

Reading the Liturgy of the Word of the daily Mass will give a moment to be connected to the Mass, even done at a time when Mass is not being celebrated.

Taking time out to be quiet with Jesus, simply in his presence, uniting your spirit with his, will help you with the rest of the day.

The pastures that our Good Shepherd leads us to will be rich and plentiful because he will there with us.