

Second Sunday after Easter

As we heard in St. Peter's first letter and St John's Gospel, this is the Sunday that is commonly known as Good Shepherd Sunday.

The Good Shepherd says, "I know my sheep and they know me." How do we know our Lord and how does He know us? We know a lot of facts about Jesus. We know that He was born in Bethlehem, regardless of what some liberal theologians profess, but that's for another sermon. He was taken to Egypt by his Father who was told in a dream that King Herod was going to kill Him. He was raised in Nazareth. He visited and taught at the Temple at age twelve. He worked as a carpenter which was His earthly father's trade. He was baptized by John in the Jordan River. He preached, healed, and performed other miracles, for almost three years. He was persecuted most of that time, and was finally crucified at approximately thirty-three years of age, and buried in a tomb. Most importantly, he rose from the dead, dwelt briefly with his disciples, and returned to his Father's side.

We also know some theology about Jesus. He is one person with two completely different natures. That is to say, He is both man and God. As a man, He felt the fears, happiness, hatred and the greed that all of us humans feel. But He was also the Son of God who could forgive, protect, defend and grant salvation to His follower. These things are important because Christianity, unlike most, if not all other religions, is an in-history religion – meaning that many of the events found in the Bible can be found in other written sources that have been reported as factual. It is not a philosophy about life. It is based on what has actually happened in our human life, that is, in history. The important thing about knowing Jesus is to feel, inside yourself, a belief in these facts and a belief in Jesus and his promises. This is sometimes referred to as "letting Jesus into your heart" or being "born again". Where you give your heart says a great deal about where you expect to find your salvation.

We do not always find these warm feelings and emotions present within us. Occurrences in our daily lives, both within us and around us, may make us feel lost and confused. It does not mean that we are no longer Christians. It simply means that we are merely humans and are searching

for answers. We live in a time when love is seen as a feeling, not as a commitment. Feeling is not dependable. Witness the mess we have made of love in our society. Unfortunately, many people see love as portrayed on television and in the movies, focusing on physical love and not emotional love. In our society today abortion is used as birth control, children are having children; there is an epidemic of single parent households; and children are assuming adult caretaker roles with even younger children. As we all know, physical love has an emotional rush that may be thrilling initially, but it disappears almost as fast as it arrives. Then what do we have? Only a charitable, caring love can survive the trials of life.

The mind and the heart are indeed involved in knowing Jesus, not separately, but together. To know Jesus truly is to know Him as Lord. That is, with our mind: that He is both God and man; and He makes available to us eternal life, the basis of Christianity is to know Him as the One to whom we are totally committed. To know Him with our hearts. If we know Him with both our hearts and our minds, following His Commandments and believing in His promises will be made even easier.

This is Good Shepherd Sunday in which we celebrate that the Lord is our Shepherd. That makes us His sheep. As we have heard in the Gospel according to St. John, our Lord knows us as we know Him. He does not call Himself our “good idea”. But our Shepherd. And we are to be His sheep. Not just His students and not His “groupies” – mindless followers. Like good sheep, we know Him in following Him, living as He taught, not as we choose. Worshipping as He taught, not in some way we think is better. He has shown us how to live our lives. If we follow our shepherd, eternal life will be our reward.

In the end, there is no other way to know Jesus. We can not think our way and we can not feel our way to being good Christians. We can only do what He set out for us to do: to live as He taught us to live, to follow after those He himself sent to be our shepherds, to worship in the only way that He taught us to worship. That is, to live by the Church’s precepts in communion with the Church’s bishops and centering our lives in the Church’s Eucharist. When we do sin, it is in that sacrament, after we confess and repent, that we receive absolution, as a result of Christ’s loving sacrifice on the Cross.

In those who follow Him faithfully, in their lives, and in their worship, and in the life of His Church, He will see something of Himself. Imperfect, to be sure, in each of us, and in all of us together. But STILL something that could have come from no other source! And it is to that He will respond when we present ourselves at His heavenly sheepfold. For that response, He came once to make His life available to each of us, and He comes again to offer himself (both for us and to us) in every Eucharist we celebrate. Let us pray.

O Heavenly and glorious Father, We thank you for our Good Shepherd. We ask for your guidance as we attempt to follow in your Son's footsteps. Help us to understand the sacrifice He made for us. All this we ask in the Name of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen