

A fire breaks out in a convent
and a group of nuns are trapped on the 3rd floor.
Thinking quickly, they took off their habits and tied them together
And use them as a rope to climb down from the window.
After safely reaching the ground, a reporter asks,
“Weren’t you worried that those habits would rip as you climbing down?”
“Of course not,” said the mother superior,
“You know old habits are hard to break.”

This fourth Sunday of Easter has come to be known as
Good Shepherd Sunday,
Because the Gospel reading all three years focuses in on the theme
of Jesus as the Good Shepherd.
And in all of these readings
Jesus tells us that we are the sheep and he is the shepherd.

Now, I know very little about sheep and shepherding,
and so of course I went on line to my cyberspace friends for help
and found out that they knew very little about sheep as well.

One person was insulted at being compared to a sheep:
He wrote: “Sheep are stupid and dirty.
They have no ability to smell water (unlike bovines),
so they will stand near a pond and die of thirst if not led to it.
They can do nothing on their own and have to be led everywhere.
No, I do not like being compared to sheep.”

But then another wrote:
“I never thought I'd be defending sheep,
but since we are called God's sheep,
maybe you would also like to know
that sheep have a strong herding instinct.
Shepherds interpret this as a form of extreme loyalty.
I have also seen many a ewe killed or severely wounded protecting
the lambs of the flock from wild dogs.
So when God says we are sheep,
we are being compared to a loyal, courageous, persevering,
and protective species.”

So I guess I don't know a whole lot about sheep,
but I did find this out about those who care for sheep.

One of my cyberspace friends wrote this:

“My son Caleb and I picked up his 4-H lamb last night.
It's a little guy, which he is to bottle feed for the next three weeks.
He'll have to train it to lead, see to its inoculations,
shear it when necessary, trim its hooves, clean its stall
and generally care for its life from now on.

Two years from now he will assist in its lambing,
and the cycle will start again.

Eventually he will have to deal with the issues of its aging and death.

It is a major responsibility for an eleven year old.

I'm not sure he has grasped this as yet.”

Perhaps we shouldn't get so caught up in whether being compared
to a sheep is a good thing or a bad thing. Who knows?

But I do know this: **Having a good shepherd has to be a good thing.**

To know that Jesus is totally committed to us:

Feeding us with the Eucharist.

Teaching us through his Word.

Cleansing us through the forgiveness of sin
and Healing us through holy oils.

Teaching us commitment so that we can live out our covenants in life.

Indeed, we have in Jesus a Good Shepherd.

But we also need to remember this: Jesus is not just a Good Shepherd....

He also the Lamb of God...the one led to the slaughter.

My cyberspace friend, the one with the son Caleb, also wrote this

“To see Jesus as shepherd, **and** as the lamb lead to slaughter,
gave the people of his day an image of the deepest commitment.

The suffering and the Lordship of God

come together in the one person Jesus.

This image gives us all an insight into the depth and breadth
of the divine love.”

And so maybe we don't have to worry about

whether or not being compared to a sheep is a good thing.

Maybe we simply need to make sure

we are doing our best to follow the shepherd.

When a priest is ordained,
he will often have a prayer card printed and distributed.
I did that more than 27 years ago
and the prayer I chose was Thomas Merton's
Prayer of Trust and Confidence.

I've always liked that prayer because it conveys
the same theme as this Good Shepherd Sunday.
We don't always know all that we need to know,
But we have a God who loves us for even trying.
I'd like to close with that prayer.

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think that I am following Your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please You does, in fact, please You.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this,
You will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore will I trust You always though I may seem to be lost and in the
shadow of death, I will not fear.
For You are always with me,
and You will never leave me to face my perils alone. Amen.