

Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 13, 2008

Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Psalm 23:1-6; 1Peter 2:20b-25; John 10:1-10

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GOOD SHEPHERD SUNDAY

Have you ever listened attentively to a wonderful Sunday homily and hoped to hear those final words that, for you, would have summed up the whole message? You waited expectantly but that clincher never came. Just so, as I read today's Gospel, I am disappointed that this terrific "homily" of Jesus is not finished off today with just one more line: *I am the good shepherd...*, ("...and that is why, as I just explained, I take such good care of my sheep").

Last year when I wrote a reflection for this same Sunday, I likened myself reluctantly to a sheep that knows the shepherd and is known by him, recognizes his voice, and follows him. I ended on the note that being a sheep isn't "that bad after all."

In fact, as I was preparing today's preaching, I came to a greater appreciation for the author of the twenty-third psalm (today's responsorial). David, for all his later failings, must have been an exemplary shepherd in his youth. He knew his sheep well and they knew him. They recognized his voice as he called each by name. They followed him with confidence. Yet, I envision David, as the daylight fades, removing his sandals and shepherd's cloak, laying aside his rod and staff, and placing himself as a humble sheep before his loving God. He then proceeds to sing from his grateful heart the surpassingly beautiful lyrics that have been repeated perhaps more than any other poetic piece over the centuries and translated into numerous languages. David had a feel for the needs of his charges and provided bountifully for them in caring ways. He knew well that a loving God, his shepherd, would continually do the same for him.

We too can be both sheep and shepherd interchangeably. Our provident Shepherd, who himself became a Lamb in order to lay down his life for us, fulfills our every need. He gives us rest and refreshment (see vs 2, 3a) as we spend prayerful moments in his loving presence. He gently guides us on *right paths* (vs. 3b), that is, paths of justice and truth. As we journey along, he urges us to be shepherds as well, carrying fearlessly his message of justice, peace and reconciliation to our waiting, hurting brothers and sisters. Throughout, we experience...*only goodness and kindness* (vs. 6a) accompanying us every day of our lives.

As each of us puts the finishing touches to our personal "homily," may we be able to add with conviction: *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want...and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come.* These are the opening and closing lines of psalm 23 (vs 1, 6b) Do our lives reflect the total trust expressed in the in-between verses?