

Are you a Good Shepherd?

There once was a shepherd who looked over at his flock of sheep in the pasture. The day is ending soon, and he has to herd the sheep into their pen for the night. The shepherd calls for his trusty sheepdog and asks it to get the job done.

"Right away, sir," says the sheepdog.

10 minutes later, and the shepherd glances out his window to see the sheep safely in their pen. The sheepdog bounds in through the door to report the completion of its task.

"Excellent work, did you get all of them?" asks the shepherd.

"Yes, all 40 of them."

The shepherd stares confusedly at the sheepdog. "Hang on, I thought I only had 37 sheep?"

The sheepdog replies, "Well yes, I rounded them up."

Today we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday in the Church and the World Day of Prayer for Vocations in the church. As we know with the shortage of priests and clergy in the world today, it is important that we take a day to specifically pray for those who may be discerning a religious vocation to help lead the flock of God.

It is interesting to think about Good Shepherd Sunday. We can think of course of Christ being the ultimate shepherd of the church and all of the goodness that he brings in leading us. But we are also called to be good shepherds of the people that God has entrusted to us. What are the qualities of a Good Shepherd? I thought I would give old AI a try and see what it came up with for the answer to that question and I guess I was pretty impressed.

Sacrificial Love and Commitment: The good shepherd lays down their life for the sheep and is committed to them, rather than abandoning them in danger.

Intimate Knowledge: They know each sheep by name, and the sheep recognize the shepherd's voice, fostering trust.

Protection and Security: A good shepherd defends the flock against enemies, working tirelessly to provide safety.

Guidance and Provision: They lead the flock to fresh, nourishing pastures and still waters.

Proactive Care: They seek out the lost or straying sheep and carry them close.

Gentleness and Strength: They are tender, carrying lambs in their arms, but strong and courageous enough to face dangers.

Observation and Diligence: They have high awareness and endurance, working in all weather conditions to keep the flock safe

So to compare, we may need to ask the question, what then are Bad Shepherds? For that answer, we can look to scripture as it outlines it for us there.

The prophet Ezekiel writes, “Woe to you shepherds who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally” (Ezekiel 34:2-4).

So after reading the comparisons, how do you rate as a shepherd?

Do we think about ourselves more than we do others?

Do we know the names of the people around us in our parish?

Do we share in our food, our clothing our blessings?

Do we visit the sick or homebound?

Do we think about those who we no longer see in our church and make a concerted effort to go after them?

Do we judge people by their actions and put them down?

This continuing Easter Season gives us the opportunity to bring to new life some of our old patterns and change some of the things that we have been doing to become better shepherds to the people around us.

May Jesus, The Good Shepherd, continue to guide us and help us to live by His example to be the best shepherds that we can be.

God’s Blessings,

Deacon Jim