

Caring Relationships: The Shepherd and Others

Intro. Every year during the Easter season, our church tradition celebrates the image of Christ the Good Shepherd. The shepherd knows his sheep and they know his voice. It is a beautiful image of the Lord taking care of his people. Any shepherds here? Anyone have much knowledge about sheep? (What can you tell us about sheep and being a shepherd to them?) Few of us in these parts have much knowledge except as pets. For some people, sheep are cute and cuddly and gentle. Others feel they are dirty, rambunctious and are always wandering away from the flock and the shepherd. In the western states it is common to see sheep dotting the landscape and the occasional shepherd's camper nearby.

I. In the Lord's time everyone knew something about sheep. They either raised them for food or wool. Sheep were critical to the culture and the economy. They naturally became an image in their religious practices. The Old Testament mentions sheep and shepherds as well as the image of God leading his people from Egypt through the desert to the Promised Land. It is a good image, but may not have much connection for us today. We have to come up with images that describe the relationship God has with us that have meaning for *us* and *our* culture. What are some images of caring relationships? It is Mothers' Day. Fathers' Day is not far away. Teachers come to mind. Grandparents who raise their grandchildren are images of caring relationships. How about the two young men who recently gave their lives to protect other students.

There are women and men who have been mentors to us. I will always remember Fr. Al Krupp who with wacky humor and serious wisdom got me to consider becoming a priest.

Concl. I recently saw a different image, not nearly as cute. Like human parents who know their children's voices, penguin parents can recognize the sound of their babies in the middle of thousands of other squawking penguins. When they get separated, they can usually find each other. But sometimes they don't and that's where analogies even in nature fail. The Lord **always** knows where we are: when we are lost and confused or don't want to be found. He *knows* but doesn't always rush out to rescue us unless we ask. He lets us make our own decisions, even bad ones. I suggest we find an image that best describes our relationship with the Lord and plug

that into today's celebration of Good Shepherd Sunday. We could also call it Good Parent Sunday or Good Teacher, Good Mentor or Good Friend Sunday. Whoever it is, the Lord is watching over us through them. The Lord gave us an example. **We should shepherd one another.**

Fr. Michael Pendergraft

May 12, 2019