

Homily.4Easter.5.8.22  
Saint Bernard Church  
Deacon Tim Sullivan

## SHEPHERD AND SHEEP

We all know that as Christians we're supposed to try to be like Jesus. That's a tall order, but it's good to set challenging goals. This evening we'll focus on two characteristics of Jesus and how we can imitate those characteristics in our own lives.

In this weekend's very short Gospel, Jesus talks about His role as a shepherd. He says that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him.

The shepherd leads his sheep; he protects them and he feeds them. And that's what Jesus does for all of us.

Jesus explains his role earlier in Chapter 10 of John's Gospel. He says, "I am the good shepherd." He makes reference to how He leads and protects His sheep, and they follow Him.

But then, in verse 11, He says: "A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." And He adds: "I will lay down my life for the sheep."

So Jesus is more than a shepherd. He's also a sheep, a lamb.

John the Baptist, upon seeing Jesus, announces in John 1:29: "Behold the Lamb of God."

Saint Peter, in his First Letter, refers to "the precious blood of Christ, as of a spotless unblemished lamb."

The dual roles of Jesus as shepherd and lamb are captured in Revelation 7:17, which reads: "For the Lamb who is in the center of the throne will shepherd them."

So if we are to live with Jesus as our model, we must also be both shepherds and sheep. Let me explain how this can work. Here's a strategy, a pathway, a method, every one of us can follow to fulfill our roles as shepherds and sheep.

This method will be based upon what happens at Mass. It's a way we can live the Mass in our lives outside of the church building.

Here, in a nutshell, is what happens at Mass.

1. We put our lives on the altar in the form of bread and wine.
2. We ask the Holy Spirit to come upon us, represented by the bread and wine, and unite us with Jesus.
3. We offer ourselves as a sacrifice, asking that our trials, challenges and sufferings be joined with those of Jesus and made a blessing for others.

4. The bread and wine become Jesus, in all His fullness.
5. When we receive Jesus in Communion, we are united with Him and receive the graces that flow from His suffering and death.

In the Mass, we are primarily sheep. As I said, we join in the sacrifice of the true Lamb, Jesus Christ, uniting the sacrifices in our lives with His.

And here is how all of us can repeat what happens at Mass in our normal, everyday lives. In this process, we are both sheep and shepherds.

Step 1: Before any encounter with another person or group during each day, we ask the Holy Spirit to come upon us, to be with us and guide us in our interactions with others. In this step we are more like sheep.

Step 2: We ask the Holy Spirit to unite us with Jesus and to make Jesus present through us in our interactions with others. We ask the Holy Spirit to guide us in this process, to tell us what to say and what to do. In this step, we are still sheep but moving towards being shepherds.

Step 3: We realize that, regardless of our position or status, every one of us can influence the environment that exists when we interact with others. This is our role as shepherds.

Step 4: Our goal is to make every situation, every environment we are in throughout the day, more Christian. We want to bring Jesus in some way to every person we meet. Again, this is what shepherds do, leading, protecting and feeding.

Every one of you is placed by the Holy Spirit in the circumstances of your life to be the presence of Jesus in each of those circumstances. Every interaction with others in your life is set up by the Holy Spirit to give you the opportunity to bring Jesus into that situation.

You may not have as much human power or status as other people that you meet with during your day. But each of you is baptized. Almost all of you are confirmed. You have the Church. You have the power of the Holy Spirit. And you have the power to influence others to be more Christlike, to be a shepherd.

And, at the same time, you are humble and realize that any spiritual power you have to be a shepherd comes from the Holy Spirit, not from you. And you also realize that maybe someone in your presence can be a shepherd in some way for you, and so you are always conscious of being a lamb.

Just like Jesus, you are called to be a shepherd and a sheep. What our world needs today more than anything else is for each of us to live out this calling. This is how Jesus meant for the world to be transformed, through you and me, taking Jesus to everyone we meet.

I want to close with a quote from Pope Saint Paul VI from his document, *Evangelization in the Modern World*:

**Let us preserve the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing. Let it mean for us...an interior enthusiasm that nobody and nothing can quench. May it be the great joy of our consecrated lives. And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world.**