

The fourth Sunday of Easter is known as Good Shepherd Sunday. A special day set aside to pray for vocations to the priesthood and religious life. The Gospel reading on this day to no surprise, always speaks to us about Jesus who is the Good Shepherd. Today's Gospel is particularly short. We hear from the Gospel of John,

“My sheep hear my voice. **I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.** No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch out of the Father's hand.”

As we reflect today on the image of Jesus being a shepherd- it means that we are sheep. And to tell someone that they are sheep is not necessarily a very positive thing. Sheep are not the brightest of animals, they follow blindly. So when we say people are sheep it means that they are following without thinking, without paying attention.

But if we are the Lord's sheep, if we are his flock is that what we are doing?

The great English theologian, Blessed Cardinal Newman, wrote,

“We are not our own, any more than what we possess is our own. We did not make ourselves; we cannot be supreme over ourselves. We cannot be our own masters. We are God's property by creation, by redemption, by regeneration. He has a triple claim on us. Is it not our happiness thus to view the matter? Is it any happiness, or any comfort, to consider that we are our own? It may be so for the young and the prosperous. These may think it a great thing to have everything, they suppose, their own way, -to depend on no one- to have to think of nothing out of sight. **But as time goes on they will find out that**

**independence was not made for us-that it is an unnatural state- it may do for a while, but will not carry us on safely to the end.“**

Newman says that God has a triple claim on us; we are God's property by creation, by redemption, by regeneration. We do not make ourselves; we do not save ourselves; we do not renew or breathe new life into ourselves. We may try. Look at me, going to the gym does wonders; but it will not carry me to the end.

Most of the time at funerals, we either sing or recite the psalm of the shepherd, the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm, "The Lord is my Shepherd there is nothing I shall want." And then you listen to the eulogy, especially if it is a tragic death of someone young-words which go in the exact opposite vein of Cardinal Newman. "He was his own person, his own master, supreme in his ability to do, to make, to accomplish. He was an unstoppable force of goodness." And then there are these intellectual contortions claiming that, despite what we see, despite death it will somehow go on. The universe, the powers that be, won't allow it to end.

And I find these kinds of words very sad, because they reveal that our faith, that the voice of the Shepherd has not penetrated deeply into our minds, our souls, our being.

"My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish." My friends, these are the true words of life. True happiness is rooted in acceptance in our dependence on the Lord, in the satisfaction of being one of the Lord's flock and following him as his sheep.