

## Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 25, 2021

All you seasoned parents out there understand just how difficult it can be to get a child to do something or not do something. Clean your room. Stop teasing your brother. Go to bed. Leave those matches alone. Put your phone down while we're eating. Do your homework. Don't lie to me. Take out the garbage. Take a shower. I hope you get the picture.

And we get it. We understand why kids often resist following the requests and commands and guidance of their parents. And there isn't only one reason. There are certainly many reasons, depending on the personality of the child and the kind of family dynamics and structure and expectations etc. But I do believe that there is one particular reason that kind of stands out, one that seems to be present in nearly all of the examples I mentioned above. And it is this: Children often resist their parents because they often don't really see any value in what they are being asked to do or not to do, they don't really see why these things are important. To children these types of things often appear to be completely arbitrary, for them, it seems to just be things that parents do.

And while parents, at times, often get pretty frustrated with their sons and daughters over these kinds of things, most don't get unreasonably angry about it. They just vent for a little while and then it's over, because they know that children often aren't really thinking or understanding in the same way that adults do. It's just kids being kids.

Yet, if we are being honest, we know that WE (adults) often ACT in the exact same way, often push back against what others are asking of us. We really don't like it when spouses put too many demands on us. And we often don't like the traffic laws that restrict what we can do. We don't like it when our bosses want us to do things a certain way. And we don't like it when our significant other, pays too close attention to what we eat or drink. We don't like it when people give advice (even if that advice is sound). And we don't like it when our Church tells us the requirements (and prohibitions) when it's time to plan a wedding or a funeral. Yes, adults don't like others telling them what to do either . . .

You see, my guess is that adults often push back against these sorts of things because we all-to-often are convinced that we know better, that OUR way is a BETTER way, that any advice or instruction or guidance that comes from another is never as good as the advice we give ourselves. In other words, in most matters (maybe all) we want to call the shots. We wanna be in charge. "No one is going to tell me what to do," we often think to ourselves.

**"I am the good shepherd."**

Today, we gather on this, the Fourth Sunday of Easter, what we often call Good Shepherd Sunday, to once again reflect on this comforting image. We hear how Jesus is a shepherd unlike any other; a shepherd who will never run from trouble, but who will give his life for his sheep if necessary. His care for his flock is unlimited, unconditional and unquestionable. And understandably, this makes us feel really good inside, makes us feel loved and safe and valued.

This image of God is in stark contrast to how most people viewed God for much of human history and how some still view God today. God is simply to be feared, viewed sometimes with suspicion and unpredictable. But the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is something altogether different. This is a God who can be trusted, a God who will protect us, a God who is on our side - not just when we do the right thing, but when we mess up too. The love our God has for us is non-negotiable. And that is really Good News.

Yet, there is a trap we can fall into if we are not careful. You see, it is one thing to believe that God will be good to us, help us, protect us, and love us. But it is something altogether different to buy into what the image of the Good Shepherd implies. And what is that? Well, it implies that we can't simply turn to the Good Shepherd when it suits our purposes, when we feel we need him. Rather it means that we are expected also to listen and to follow, not just when it is convenient, but always, every moment and every day, in every situation and in every circumstance. Turning to and relying on the Good Shepherd is not a once-in-a-while kind of thing. It's a way of life. It's who we are in the deepest recesses of our being.

Put it in another way - it means that we have to accept in faith that God knows better, that God's way is better, that following his lead is the only way that makes any sense. And that means we are invited to resist the temptation to be in charge, to call the shots, to make our own way in this world. There is a better way - God's way - the voice of the Good Shepherd leading us to precisely where we need to be each and every day.

And that, my dear friends, takes humility. And trust. And faith.

May the image of The Good Shepherd not simply fill us with warm and fuzzy feelings, but rather inspire us to listen for God's voice in all things. And when we hear that voice, when we feel that tug luring us in a particular direction, down a particular path, let's have the courage to simply follow wherever it takes us - knowing that God is at our side every step on the way.

Father Boat