

Fourth Sunday of Easter “A” May 6-7, 2017

Every year *Time Magazine* features the 100 Most Influential People in the world. Getting past the entertainment and sports celebrities, there are some religious leaders listed, such as Pope Francis. If these religious leaders are influential in any positive way, it is because they are shepherds who lovingly care for people.

Every fourth Sunday of Easter, the Scriptures, especially the Gospel, from St. John’s 10th chapter, deal with the role of a shepherd- leader. Jesus speaks of himself as a shepherd, a good shepherd. Perhaps we romanticize the role of a shepherd and the nature of the sheep he/she cares for.

Then and now, shepherds have a demanding job, requiring many hours leading the sheep to pastures, to water, and protecting them from predators. Sheep are not very intelligent, often straying from the flock, sometimes ornery, and smelly. Sheep are not the cuddly lambs we imagine.

Shepherds often take turns leading and watching their flock, even sleeping in the fields guarding them. At night when the sheep were gathered into an outdoor corral, the shepherd slept at its opening acting as the flock’s gatekeeper, putting his life in danger. This is why in today’s Gospel, Jesus states: “I am the gate for the sheep.”

As St. Peter tells us, in the 2nd reading, speaking about Jesus: “by his wounds you have been healed, for you had gone astray like sheep, but you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.” Jesus indeed did give his life for his sheep, for all of us. He is not only the good shepherd for us but also the sacrificial Lamb of God.

Jesus also tells us in the Gospel that he calls his sheep by name and they follow him because they recognize his voice. As members of his flock, may we listen to his voice in the Scriptures and the teaching of the Church and live by his life-giving principles.

Besides being Jesus' sheep, many of us are shepherds as well, caring for our families and others. The word pastor means shepherd, who is called by ordination to care for the people assigned to him. Please pray for me and all priest shepherds, that we may be more and more like Jesus the Good and loving Shepherd.

Not many of us may be featured in *Time Magazine*, but we can be just as influential in our families, workplaces, communities, and parish, if, with the help of God's grace, we strive to be Jesus' good sheep, and caring shepherds for each other.