

Homily

4th Sunday of Easter – A

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski 10-11,
May 02-03, 2020

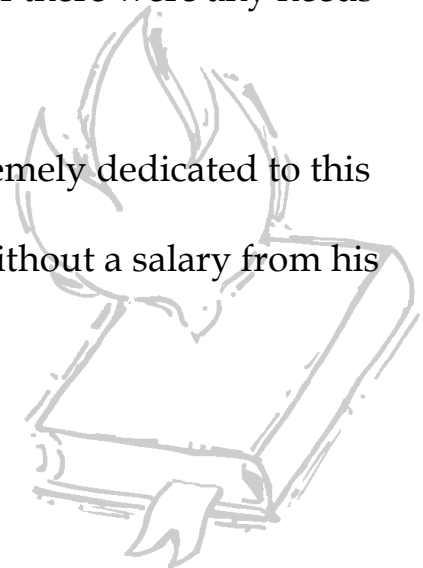
Acts 2: 14, 36-41
Ps 23: 1-3, 3-4, 5-6
1 Pt 2: 20-25
Jn 10: 1-10



When I was preparing to celebrate this mass at Sacred Heart, I had spoken to Fr. Ray Lester and sister Marybeth McClements, both of whom have been very much invested in this community for a great deal of time. Both of them have told me that they have been making weekly phone calls to every single

member of this community to make sure that they are well, that the parishioners are well-provided and to find out if there were any needs that need to be addressed.

Father Ray and Sr. Marybeth have been extremely dedicated to this community. Father Ray has been ministering without a salary from his



last parish to this one for a good twenty some years. Sister Marybeth is paid by her community to minister here in this parish. She does not receive a salary from Sacred Heart because the parish has no money to give her.

Both Fr. Ray and Sr. Marybeth have dedicated their life to taking care of the people in this parish. Fr. Ray is approaching his 85th birthday and Sr. Marybeth has been here for a good number of years. Both of them have served as shepherds to these beautiful, vulnerable, wonderful sheep.



Over at St. Patrick's Church, as I have been celebrating these online masses and trying to figure out a way to communicate and minister to all of you from a distance,

Fr. Dan Hessling (pictured on the left, bottom row) who served in this parish for over eleven years as a priest and has lived in this community since the time of birth) has been assisting me very quietly in his own special way. Fr. Dan has been living with us while healing from his medical issues, accompanied by his two dogs (Max and that brutally

horrible dog, Sampson). During this stay-at-home period, Fr. Dan has been living on the second floor of the rectory and he has been assisting me by providing all kinds of computer necessities to help me along with these video Masses, whether it be him providing card readers or cables or even donated to computers to me in this cause.

Fr. Dan has been extremely valuable in trying to help me out this last year in his role as “pastor emeritus,” Fr. Dan has been referencing me to the pulse of this community and he has been telling me about all the parishioners and their backgrounds. I am extremely indebted to Fr. Dan, knowing that as he deals with his own medical issues, he has allowed me to do what I need to do in order to serve all of you, which is why the bishop sent me to this parish. The bishop and Fr. Dan want me to help you all rebuild this parish and pull us out of the mess that has compromised our parish’s security.

Father Jim Fanale over at St. Anne’s Church is the “sunshine call” of that particular community. Fr. Fanale is still bouncing around, ministering to the folks in that area of the diocese while providing me the necessary space to make a smooth transition here the Church.



I was told if the story is correct that some twenty-three years ago, Fr. Jim served as a teacher over in Kankakee and the predecessor had died, a tragic

accident. He was riding his bike and died when he was hit by a vehicle. At that time, the Viatorian superior asked Fr. Jim to serve in this parish, as a temporary replacement. Some twenty-two years later, this good priest ended up retiring from the same parish.

Similar to Fr. Ray, Father Fanelli had cut his salary significantly because he did not want to spend parish monies on himself. He often took the brunt of whatever he could do because he wanted to make this parish about the people and not about himself.

Three different parishes; three different stories; three very different types of shepherds. Yet, each parish was led by a shepherd and God had called each shepherd to serve, based on their talents and gifts. They were called - I was called - *you* have been to be shepherds of some community, shepherds of some location.

Essentially, when people are looking at a priest like me, like Fr. Dan or Fr. Jim or Fr. Ray or Sr. Marybeth, they are trying to see Christ working through us. This ministry is not about me.; the ministry is not about them. The ministry always is about Christ, the good shepherd working through all of us and through each of you. If we are doing this ministry correctly, then Christ is the sheep gate through which the faithful encounter the divine.

What does that story convey from the fifth chapter of the gospel of John (verses 1-18)? If I am correct, the story tells of a man laying by the pool of Bethesda who tried to get down into the healing waters of the pool to cure him of his severe illness. As we are told in the story, no one was willing to carry this man to the healing waters so that man was not able to be cleansed of his illness.

Then the man encounters Jesus at the entryway of this pool. Without being asked, Jesus in this story chooses to cleanse this man of illness (one of seven miracles portrayed in the gospel of John). Jesus made it clear that the man did not need to be carried down to the waters of Bethesda to be cleansed; Jesus *was* the healing water – Jesus *was* the gate

through which miracles could take place. We come to learn in this story that the Father's Son was the source for the water of life, the gate through which all of us can find salvation. What we learn from this story is this - if we allow Christ to lead us in guide us and if we follow his example (starting with baptism all the way through the cross and the resurrection), if we sacrifice like he did, if we serve our sheep (the ones we are commissioned to serve like he did), then we are being good shepherds.

What we learn in the scriptures is that there are good shepherds and bad shepherds; there were great leaders in the faith and some really bad ones as well. Sometimes to be a good shepherd means you have to walk through the fire; you have to walk through the cross. Lord knows I've done that in my own ministry for the sake of kids (if you do not believe me, look up my story on the internet), but if you love the sheep, you are commissioned to serve. If you love the sheep, you are willing to do what is necessary because you realize that each of our callings from God is not about the earth and the sufferings that result from earthly desires. Each of our callings from God is about getting to heaven and getting to

heaven. Each of our callings requires us to live like Christ, to live like the Good Shepherd.

So, we encounter the Good Shepherd again today on this “Good Shepherd Sunday” (the theme each year on the Fourth Sunday of Easter). Even as we are forced to stay at home, maybe this is an opportunity for you to be Good Shepherds for your families, your neighbors and certainly your community. Good Shepherds in today’s age can up a rosary, pick up a prayer book, pray for those who are in need. Good Shepherds can make a sunshine phone call and make sure that we take care of people who need to receive a message of hope. If we do that, if we allow God to work through us to be good shepherd for those around us, then we are being the shepherds of this generation. Let us be good shepherds in the way we follow Christ’s example and share this love with the people that we need. This is our prayer