

Homily
4th Sunday of Easter – B

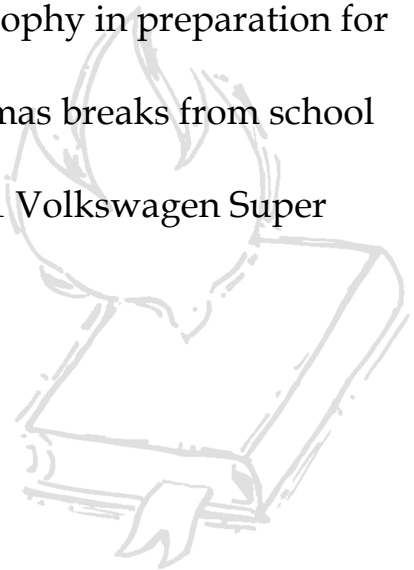
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
April 17-18, 2021

Acts 4: 8-12
Ps 118: 1, 8-9, 21-23, 26, 21, 29
1 Jn 3: 1-2
Jn 10: 11-18

I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them. This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep.

Yo soy el buen Pastor. El buen pastor da la vida por las ovejas; el asalariado, que no es pastor ni dueño de las ovejas, ve venir el lobo, abandona las ovejas y huye; y el lobo hace estrago y las dispersa; y es que a un asalariado no le importan las ovejas. Yo soy el buen Pastor, que conozco a las mías, y las mías me conocen, igual que al Padre me conoce, y yo conozco al Padre; yo doy mi vida por las ovejas.

Way back in my seminary days, I was a student at the Catholic University in Washington, D.C., studying philosophy in preparation for what was yet to come. During one of my Christmas breaks from school in 1987, I was driving my old and tarnished 1971 Volkswagen Super



beetle from Washington, D.C. to my hometown of Sandwich, Illinois (which is located about an hour and a half southwest of Chicago).

I loved that car – I became an expert at fixing all the holes in the car’s rusted-out floor, I rigged up an electric fan to provide my own form of air conditioning in the car during the summer months, and I even learned how to tune up the car and all that mechanical stuff. When you love something as much as I did this old bug, then you learn how to take care of it as well as you can.

I particularly remember working on my car at the St. Vincent/St. Joseph home in Freeport, Illinois, listening to Huey Lewis tapes on the radio while tuning up my engine and learning how to grind down the cylinder heads of my car. I spent hours listening to the type of music that was popular during that time – Huey Lewis, the Bangles, and a lot of other forgettable music that no longer is forgettable to me.

That particular December in 1987, I was preparing for the fourteen-hour drive from Washington, D.C. back home, knowing that the road conditions would be horrific. Not only did I start my drive at night

(which is the best time to drive because very people were on the road... and most were smart enough not to drive in a snowstorm, anyway), the white stuff was coming down in droves.

Prior to the trip, I had just pulled out the engine of my car to grind down the cylinder heads AGAIN (I did not say I was a great mechanic, just a mechanic) and when I put the engine back into the car, I felt that this machine was as fine-tuned as an old car could ever be. I had my musical cassette tapes in the car and in the darkest time of the night, I was on my happy way through Virginia, Maryland and the Pennsylvania mountains.

Three states into the trip, however, I noticed a light blinking on my dashboard that shined brightly on that cold winter's night. I came to find out that my battery was losing its charge as I continue to drive. When I saw the light, I thought to myself that nothing could be wrong with the car; I myself had tuned the car to perfection and there was nothing to worry about. That all said, the light remained lit, like a fly

who liked to buzz around someone throughout an otherwise enjoyable evening.

At first, I did not pay attention to the light. Then the light seemed to take offense at me and shone that much brighter. Further and further up the mountains, the dashboard became an irritant to me. Two states and eight hours later, I began to panic.

With God's help (and a bunch of worn-out rosary beads), I reached the border between Ohio and Indiana at two o'clock in the morning. By this time, the visibility on the road was practically nil and my car was gasping its last breath. Luckily for me, I noticed a sign for an Indiana Oasis (or whatever they are called in Indiana) and cajoled my car into moving forward just a few more feet. And like the little engine that could, so did my car, collapsing at the gas pump without any battery juice left within itself to move.

The only person at the Oasis was another traveler, about 35 years old, who was filling up his shiny brand new, navy blue Oldsmobile with Super Unleaded as he watched my predicament from a distance. After

surveying the predicament for a while, “Oldsmobile Man” realized that I was in a hopeless situation and offered to recharge my battery from the battery of his own car, which I gladly accepted. After a few minutes, Oldsmobile Man asked me if I wanted him to follow me for a while down the road. Although I was glad for his help, I also realized I was talking to a stranger at two o’clock in the a.m. in the middle of a snowstorm. All I wanted to do at that moment was to pour back into my rust bucket of a Volkswagen, praying I got back home in one piece.

And as it would have it, five miles past the Oasis, my car died for good. I came to find out a few days later that this soon-to-be priest was no brilliant mechanic; I did not have enough sense to secure the battery charge cable to its proper slot. As I was driving, the cable popped loose and caught itself in the fan belt, only to be shredded into bits. So at two o’clock in the morning, in the dark of the night, in the midst of a horrendous snowstorm, my car gave out. There I was in the middle of nowhere – I had no cell phone, no one was in sight and I felt

there would be no hope for me from the snowy mess in which I put myself.

I sat in the car for a while, thinking about what I had done wrong. I had a few words with God, a few with myself, and I traced back every single thing I had done to get this car up and running. I was a 22-year-old novice car engineer who had all the answers but was stuck in a blizzard with nothing but questions.

It was then, in the midst of my hopelessness that the Oldsmobile Man who charged my battery at the Oasis had pulled up behind me.

Fortunately for me, this Good Samaritan, this Good Shepherd, had less faith in my mechanic skills than I did and followed me on a hunch.

Noticing my predicament, the Oldsmobile Man pulled up behind me, took my battery out of the car, brought me to the next rest stop where he paid a gas station to recharge the battery, and then treated me to dinner.

While I was calming myself down from what turned out to be one of the most frantic days of my life, I encountered a kind-hearted person with a level head. The man introduced himself as Mark and told me that he

lived in Silver Spring, Maryland with his wife and two kids. As an associate in an East Coast consulting firm, Mark was on his way to Chicago for some business and, like me, very much enjoyed the quiet drive of the night.

As the dinner concluded, Mark brought me to the gas station and picked up my fully charged battery. He then drove me back ten miles to put the battery into my car. When I was about to pull away, thinking the story was over, Mark went beyond his way to cap off this unbelievable story.

For five more hours on this trip, the Oldsmobile Man decided to follow behind me all the way to my home, past his Chicago destination and straight to my house in Sandwich, Illinois. Because car phones were not common in 1987, Mark would communicate with me by flashing his high beams and I would return the favor by waving my hands.

Whenever my battery began to lose its charge during the trip, I would pull off to the side of the road and he swapped the charged battery from

his blue Olds with my own. For five hours, I was witnessing the Good Samaritan Story and a wonderful lesson in my faith journey.

When I finally reached my destination, I was dumbfounded. I could not understand why this very well-to-do man with the blue Olds would help me. As we reached the end of the trip, I offered this gentleman a gratuity in thanksgiving, but Mark refused to accept the gift. In response to my gesture, he said (and this I will *never* forget), “I helped you out because this is I great story. Now I can share this experience with my family and friends when I get back to Maryland.”

After a little prodding, he accepted some coffee and pastries from the house before he went on his way, never to be seen again. Now every time I hear a Huey Lewis tape, I think about the man from Maryland who took a chance with this lousy mechanic and came out with a great story of faith to tell his kids. I too, had a story to share with others, a story that connects to one of our gospel passages that reads,

I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and

scatters them. This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep.

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Every year on the Fourth Sunday of Easter, our gospel readings focus on the tenth chapter of John's Gospel and the theme of the Good Shepherd (Cycle A - Jn 10: 1-10; Cycle B - Jn 10: 11-18; Cycle C - Jn 10: 27-30). Each year on this particular Easter Sunday, Mother Church also focuses on "World Day of Prayer for Vocations," a theme which we have highlighted in our weekly bulletins this year, especially in regard to religious vocations. Last year on this particular Sunday, Pope Francis tied both themes together in his message broadcast to the youth of the world with the following communication:

"A vocation is a fruit that ripens in a well cultivated field of mutual love that becomes mutual service, in the context of an authentic

ecclesial life. No vocation is born of itself or lives for itself. A vocation flows from the heart of God and blossoms in the good soil of faithful people, in the experience of fraternal love. Did not Jesus say: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (*Jn 13:35*)?”

La vocación es un fruto que madura en el campo bien cultivado del amor recíproco que se hace servicio mutuo, en el contexto de una auténtica vida eclesial. Ninguna vocación nace por sí misma o vive por sí misma. La vocación surge del corazón de Dios y brota en la tierra buena del pueblo fiel, en la experiencia del amor fraterno. ¿Acaso no dijo Jesús: «En esto conocerán todos que sois discípulos míos: si os amáis unos a otros» (*Jn 13,35*)?

In order for a person like me to appreciate truly the value and vocation of Christian service, in no small part is this message communicated by people symbolized by “The Oldsmobile Marks” throughout the world who teach me the lesson of vocation as much by their actions as the beliefs that found their lives. My “Oldsmobile Mark” inspired me to offer that kind of kindness to others and directed me towards the kind of ministry I should lead; my hope and prayer is that the Catholic priesthood may inspire others to carry on the message of God in this generation and for generations to come.

A side note on my story for today – thinking my car was fixed upon

my return to Illinois, I took the chance by driving my car back to Washington D.C. with a classmate of mine from the seminary. To my detriment, the car died for good back in Ohio where all my problems began. Since then, Ohio has become a bane to my existence and my traveling companion became the ordinary bishop of Ft. Worth, TX. Meanwhile, I still travel on my particular journey, in search of the path God destined me to take while still searching for a functional car.

We all have our struggles; this is part of the life of a Good Shepherd as well. Let us give thanks for our Shepherds; let us pray for our Shepherds. Let us become Good Shepherds, guided by the Holy Spirit, as we offer the example of faith to the people that we meet. This is our prayer.